

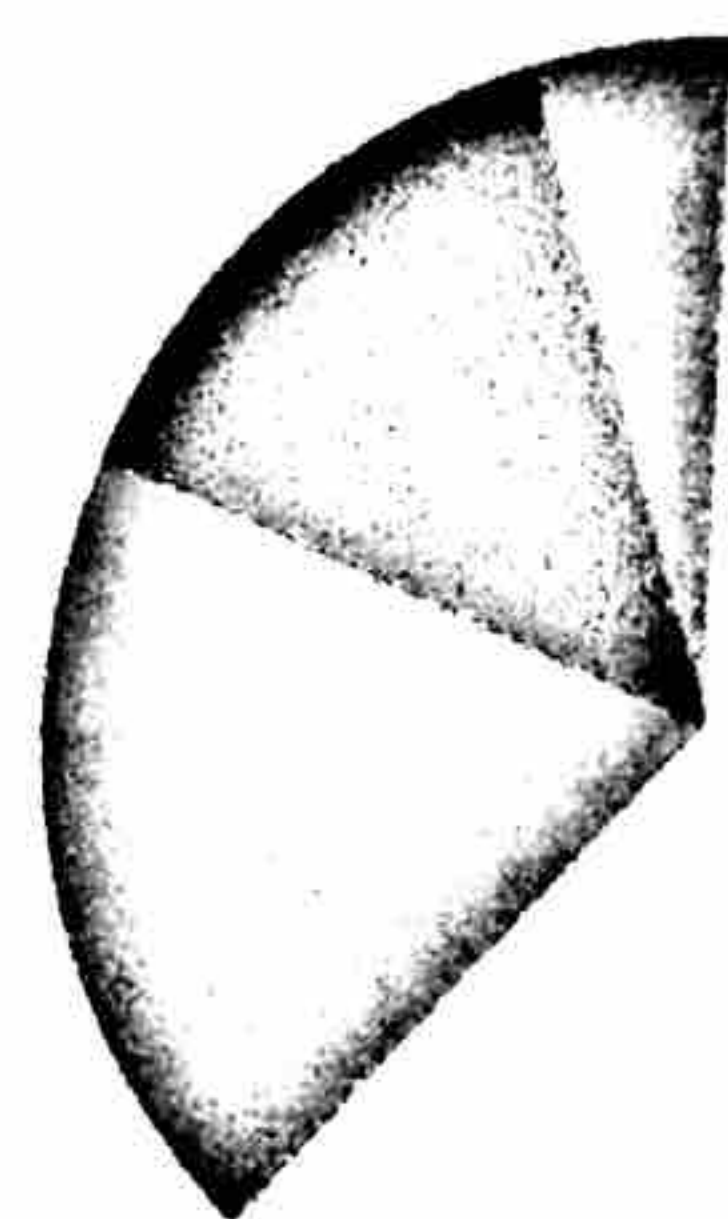
family, are reflected in the IFSP's required outcome statements. Interventionists no longer teach skills in isolation; rather, goals are developed that are relevant to the daily activities of the youngsters and their families. These statements need to be practical and functional, reflecting real-life situations occurring in the natural environment.

Service Delivery Options: Where a Special Education Is Provided

Now that the IEP/IFSP team has decided *what* will be taught, it must decide *where* special education services will be provided. The issue of appropriate placement of children with disabilities has generated considerable controversy and debate. In fact, it has been a point of contention among special educators for almost forty years. IDEA mandates that services be provided to students in the least restrictive setting—or, as Henry and Flynt (1990) called it, the most productive environment. The question confronting the team is “What is the most appropriate placement for achieving the goals (outcomes) of the IEP (IFSP)?” The chosen setting must allow the pupil to reach his or her IEP (or IFSP) goals and work toward his or her potential.

It is at this point in our decision-making model that school authorities, in collaboration with the child's parent(s)/guardian(s), attempt to reach agreement about where the student will be served. The principle guiding this decision is known as the **least restrictive environment (LRE)**. This is a relative concept; it must be determined individually for each pupil. We interpret this principle to mean that students with disabilities should be educated in a setting that most closely approximates the general education classroom *and* still meets the unique needs of the individual. As we will see shortly, for a growing number of students, this setting is the general education classroom. The concept of LRE calls for maximum opportunity for meaningful involvement and participation with classmates who are not disabled. One of its inherent difficulties is the required balancing of maximum integration with the delivery of an appropriate education.

●●●●● FIGURE 2.3 Percentage of School-Age Children With Disabilities Served in Various Educational Settings



- Regular classroom (62.1%)
- Resource room (19.2%)
- Separate class (13.7%)
- Other environments (5.0%)

NOTE: Data are for students ages 6–21 enrolled in special education during the 2013–2014 school year.

Other environments include separate schools, residential facilities, homebound/hospital environments, correctional facilities, and parentally placed in private schools.

Information based on data from the fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and outlying areas.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. (2013). Historical state-level IDEA data files. Retrieved November 13, 2013 from <http://tadnet.public.tadnet.org/pages/712>

least restrictive environment (LRE): A relative concept individually determined for each student; principle that each pupil should be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with classmates who are typical.

●●●●● TABLE 2.7 Definitions of Typical Educational Settings Serving School-Age Students With Disabilities

Regular Classroom	Students who spend at least 80 percent of the school day in a regular or general education classroom.
Resource Room	Students who receive special education and related services in the regular classroom between 40 and 79 percent of the school day. Students are "pulled out" of the regular classroom and receive specialized instruction or services in a separate classroom for limited periods of time. Services may be individualized or offered in small groups.
Separate Class	Students who receive special education and related services in the regular classroom for less than 40 percent of the school day. Commonly known as a self-contained classroom wherein pupils, usually those with more severe disabilities, receive full-time instruction or, in a modified version, participate in nonacademic aspects of school activities. Classroom is located in typical school building.
Separate School	Students who receive special education and related services in a public or private separate day school for students with disabilities, at public expense, for more than 50 percent of the school day.
Residential Facility	Students who receive a special education in a public or private residential facility, at public expense, twenty-four hours a day.
Homebound/Hospital	Students placed in and receiving a special education in a hospital or homebound program.

SOURCE: Adapted from U.S. Department of Education. (2000). *Twenty-Second Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), pp. 11-14.

Educational Placements

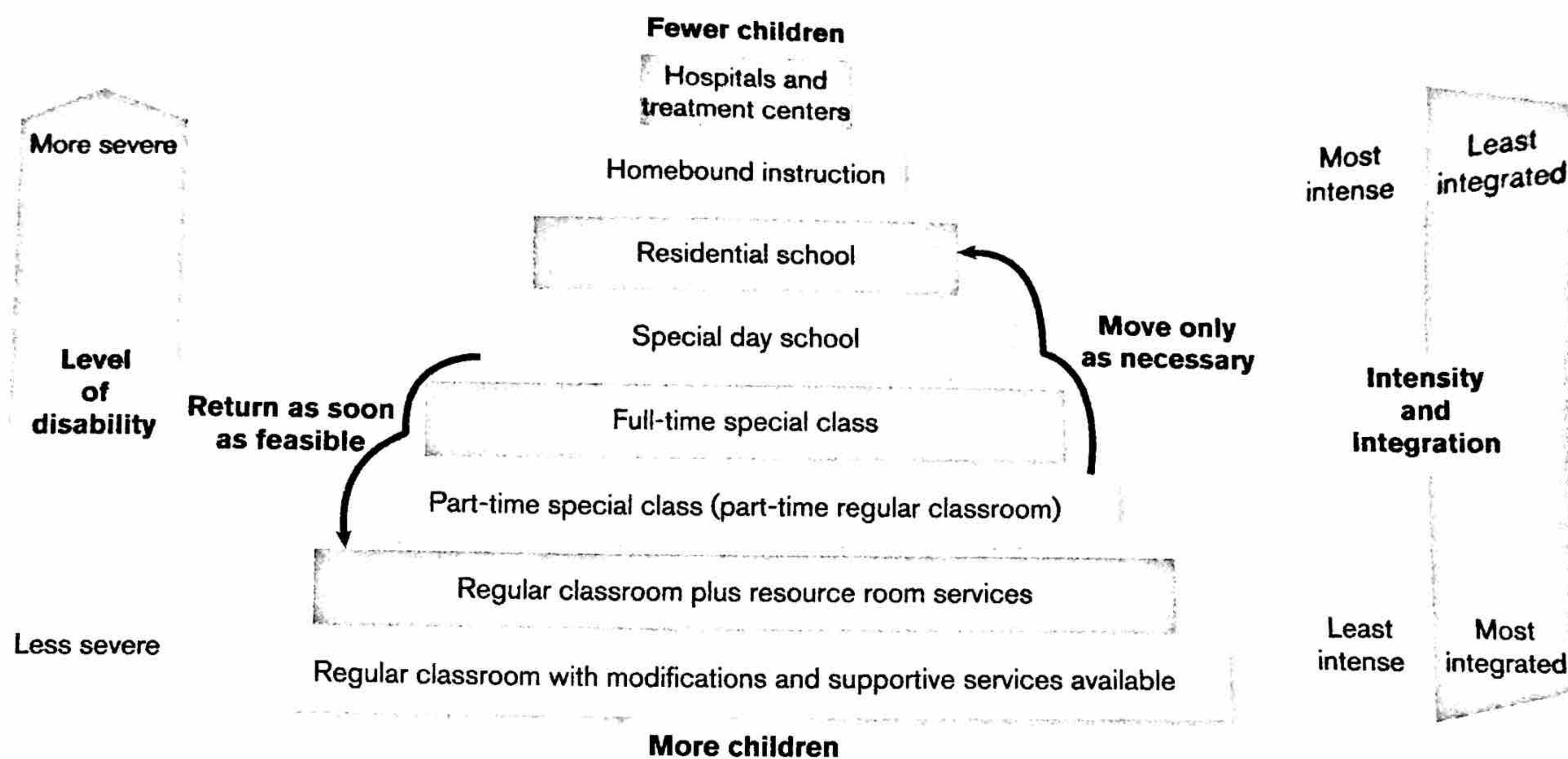
The federal government annually monitors the different settings in which pupils with disabilities receive a special education. Figure 2.3 illustrates the percentage of students in the various educational environments recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Table 2.7 describes six typical school settings serving individuals with special needs. We will report placement information in future chapters according to these environments.

A Cascade of Service Delivery Options

As we have just seen, the federal government recognizes that no one educational setting is appropriate for meeting the needs of all children with disabilities. Effective delivery of a special education requires an array or continuum of placement possibilities customized to the individual requirements of each pupil. The concept of a continuum of educational services has been part of the fabric of American special education for over four decades. Reynolds originally described the concept of a range of placement options in 1962. His thinking was later elaborated on and expanded by Deno (1970), who constructed a model offering a "cascade" or continuum of settings. A traditional view of service delivery options is portrayed in Figure 2.4.

In this model, the general education classroom is viewed as the most normalized or typical setting; consequently, the greatest number of students are served in this environment. This placement would be considered the least restrictive option. Deviation from the general education classroom should occur only when it is educationally necessary for the pupil to receive an appropriate education. Each higher level depicted in Figure 2.4 represents a progressively more restrictive setting. Movement

●●●●● FIGURE 2.4 A Traditional View of Service Delivery Options



SOURCE: Adapted from S. Graves, R. Gargiulo, and L. Sluder, *Young Children: An Introduction to Early Childhood Education* (St. Paul, MN: West, 1996), p. 398.

up the hierarchy generally leads to the delivery of more intensive services to children with more severe disabilities, who are fewer in number. However, intensive supports are now being provided in general education classrooms with increasing frequency. Environments at the upper levels are considered to be the most restrictive and least normalized, yet, as we will see shortly, they may be the most appropriate placement for a particular individual.

As originally conceived, the natural flow of this cascade of service delivery options would be in a downward movement from more restrictive settings to those viewed as least restrictive, such as the general education classroom with or without support services. Contemporary thinking, however, suggests that pupils begin in the general education classroom and ascend the model, reaching a level that meets their unique needs. A key feature of this model, too often overlooked, is that a particular placement is only temporary; flexibility or freedom of movement is what makes this model work. The settings must be envisioned as fluid rather than rigid. As the needs of the pupil change, so should the environment; this is why there is an array of service delivery possibilities. In our opinion, there is no one best educational placement for each and every student with disabilities.

A Contemporary Challenge

At the present time, the field of special education is confronting the challenge of calls for greater inclusion of individuals with disabilities into all aspects of society, especially educational programs. Simply stated, some advocates for people with disabilities (and some parents as well) dismiss the long-standing concept of a continuum of service delivery possibilities and argue that *all* pupils with disabilities, regardless of the type or severity of their impairment, should be educated in general education classrooms at neighborhood schools. They argue further that students should be served on the



Federal law stipulates that, to the maximum extent appropriate, pupils with disabilities are to be educated with their typical classmates.

basis of their chronological age rather than academic ability or mental age. This is truly an explosive proposal. The debate surrounding this issue is an emotionally charged one with great potential for polarizing the field of special education, as other professionals, advocates, and parents argue fervently against this thinking. According to Gargiulo and Kilgo (2014), supporters of this movement see it as the next great revolution in special education, whereas opponents consider it the start of a return to the “dark ages” of special education—the era before PL 94-142. We suspect that the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes.

The intensity of this debate is fueled by several factors, one of which is the inconsistent use of terminology. As frequently happens in arguments, people are often saying the same thing but using different words. Therefore, we

offer the following interpretations of key terms frequently encountered in describing this movement.

Mainstreaming

The first potentially confusing term is **mainstreaming**, which first appeared on the educational scene more than forty years ago. It evolved from an argument put forth by Dunn (1968), who, in a classic essay, questioned the pedagogical wisdom of serving children with mild intellectual disability in self-contained classrooms, which was then common practice. Other professionals soon joined with Dunn in his call for a more integrated service delivery model, resulting in the beginning of a movement away from isolated special classes as the placement of choice.

We define mainstreaming—or, in contemporary language, integration—as the social and instructional integration of students with disabilities into educational programs whose primary purpose is to serve typically developing individuals. It represents a common interpretation of the principle of educating children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Interestingly, the term *mainstreaming* itself never appears in any piece of federal legislation.

Parents no longer have to prove that their son or daughter should be mainstreamed; rather, schools must justify their position to exclude. They must prove that they have made a good-faith effort at integration or present strong evidence that an inclusionary setting is unsatisfactory (Yell, 2016). PL 108-446 currently supports this thinking.

Mainstreaming must provide the student with an appropriate education based on the unique needs of the child. It is our opinion that policymakers never envisioned that mainstreaming would be interpreted to mean that *all* children with special needs must be placed in integrated placements; to do so would mean abandoning the idea of determining the most appropriate placement for a particular child. IDEA clearly stipulates that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are to be educated with their typical peers. We interpret this provision to mean that, for some individuals, an integrated setting, even with supplementary aids and services, might be an inappropriate placement in light of the child’s unique characteristics. A least restrictive environment does not automatically mean placement with typical learners. As educators, we need to make the distinction between appropriateness and restrictiveness.

VIDEO

Staying Current

mainstreaming: An early term for the practice of integrating students with special needs into a general education classroom for all or part of the school day.

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Least Restrictive Environment

Least restrictive environment (LRE) is a legal term often interpreted to say individuals with disabilities are to be educated in environments as close as possible to the general education classroom setting. An LRE is not a place but a concept.

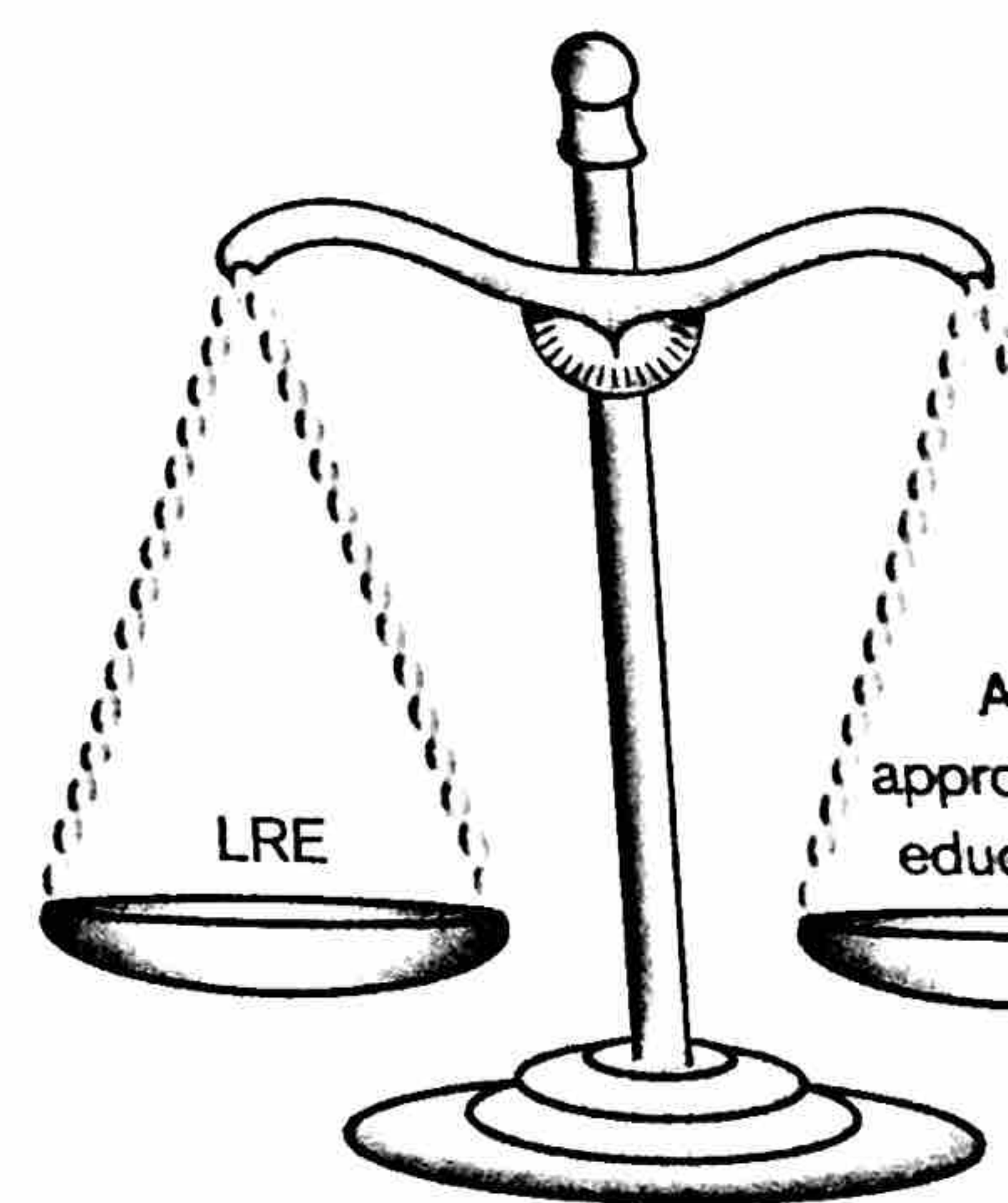
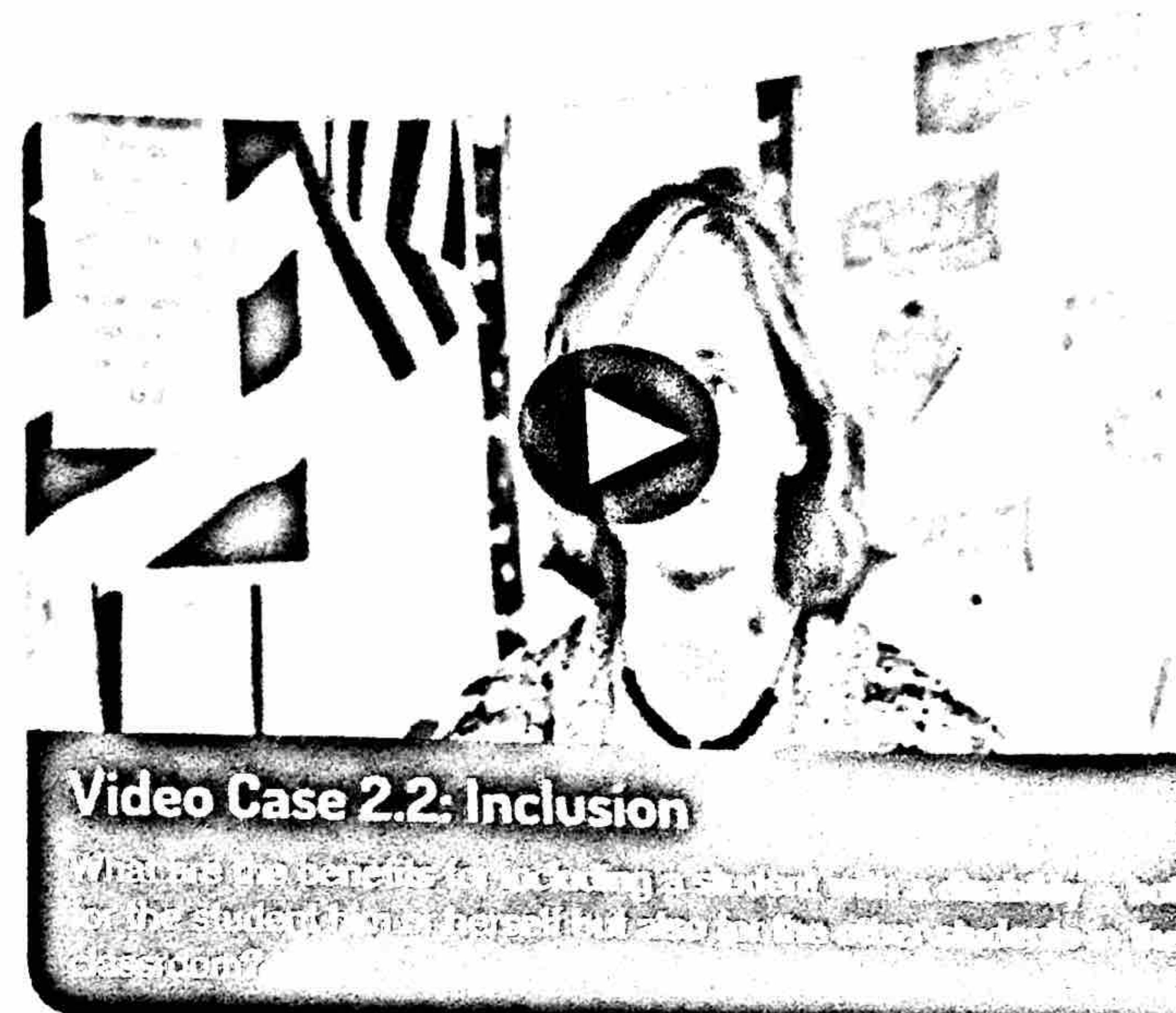
Determination of the LRE is made individually for each child. An appropriate placement for one student could quite easily be inappropriate for another. The LRE is based on the pupil's educational needs, not on his or her disability. It applies equally to children of school age and to preschoolers. Even infants and toddlers with disabilities are required by law (PL 102-119) to have services delivered in normalized settings.

Inherent within the mandate of providing a special education and/or related services within the LRE is the notion of a continuum of service delivery possibilities. Figure 2.4 (page 69) reflects varying degrees of restrictiveness, or amount of available contact with typical learners. Being only with children with disabilities is considered restrictive; placement with peers without disabilities is viewed as least restrictive. As we ascend the continuum, the environments provide fewer and fewer opportunities for interaction with typically developing age-mates—hence the perception of greater restrictiveness. Despite a strong preference for association with students who are typical, this desire must be balanced by the requirement of providing an education appropriate to the unique needs of the individual. Consequently, an integrative environment may not always be the most appropriate placement option. Each situation must be individually assessed and decided on a case-by-case basis. The educational setting must meet the needs of the learner. The philosophy of the LRE guides rather than prescribes decision making (Meyen, 1995).

We recognize, as do many other special educators, that maximum integration with typically developing children is highly desirable and should be one of our major goals. The question is when, where, with whom, and to what extent individuals with disabilities are to be integrated.

Regular Education Initiative

The third concept that requires our attention is the **regular education initiative**, or, as it is commonly called, **REI**. REI is an important link in the evolution of the full inclusion movement. The term was introduced in 1986 by former assistant secretary of education (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services) Madeleine Will, who questioned the legitimacy of special education as a separate system of education and called for a restructuring of the relationship between general (regular) and special education. She endorsed the idea of shared responsibility—a partnership between general and special education resulting in a coordinated delivery system (Will, 1986b). Will recommended that general educators assume greater responsibility for students with disabilities. She envisioned a meaningful partnership whereby general and special educators would “cooperatively assess the educational needs of students with learning problems and cooperatively develop effective educational strategies for meeting those needs” (Will, 1986a, p. 415). Will (1986b) also believes that educators must “visualize

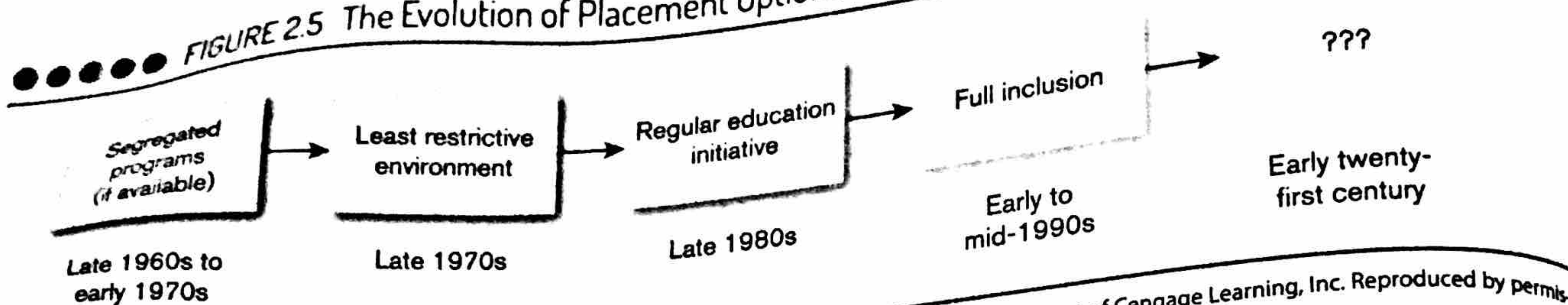


REFERENCE

Least Restrictive Environment

regular education initiative
 An approach that advocates general educators assume responsibility for the education of students with disabilities.

FIGURE 2.5 The Evolution of Placement Options for Children With Disabilities



SOURCE: From R. Gargiulo and J. Kilgo, *An Introduction to Young Children With Special Needs*, 4th ed. ©2014 Wadsworth, a part of Cengage Learning, Inc. Reproduced by permission. www.cengage.com/permissions

a system that will bring the program to the child rather than one that brings the child to the program" (p. 21). As special educators, most of us can embrace this idea. Few professionals would dispute that the delivery of special education services would be significantly enhanced if there were greater coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between general and special educators.

Full Inclusion

We see the movement toward **full inclusion** as an extension of REI and earlier thinking about where children with disabilities should be educated. Full inclusion represents the latest trend in meeting the requirement of providing an education in the least restrictive environment (Bennett, DeLuca, & Bruns, 1997). Fox and Ysseldyke (1997) consider full inclusion as a further attempt at operationalizing the concept of LRE. Figure 2.5 illustrates the evolution of this thought process.

Full inclusion is a potentially explosive issue, with vocal supporters as well as detractors. It has emerged as one of the most controversial and complex subjects in the field of special education. As with other controversial topics, an agreed-upon definition is difficult to develop. We offer the following succinct interpretation: Full inclusion is a belief that *all* children with disabilities should be taught exclusively (with appropriate supports) in general education classrooms at neighborhood schools—that is, in the same school and age-/grade-appropriate classrooms they would attend if they were not disabled. Successful implementation will require new thinking about curriculum design along with increased collaboration between general and special educators (Noonan & McCormick, 2006). Recall that Will (1986b) originally proposed this type of partnership in her regular education initiative.

Although the trend in judicial interpretations is toward inclusionary placement (Yell, 2016), the LRE mandate does not require that all pupils be educated in general education classrooms or in their neighborhood schools. The framers of IDEA never pictured, according to Kauffman (1995), that the general education classroom located in the neighborhood school would be the least restrictive setting for all pupils. In fact, policy makers believed that a cascade of placement options would be required in order to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities.

Advocates of full inclusion (Downing, 2008; Kennedy & Horn, 2004; Peterson & Hittie, 2010) argue that the present pullout system of serving students with special needs is ineffective. They contend that "the diagnostic and instructional models, practices, and tools associated with the EHA [PL 94-142] and mainstreaming are fundamentally flawed, particularly for students considered to have mild to moderate disabilities" (Skrtec, 1995, p. 625). Children are labeled and stigmatized, their programming is frequently fragmented, and general educators often assume little or no ownership for students in special education (a "your" kids versus "my" kids attitude).

WEB

Inclusion

full inclusion: An interpretation of the principle of least restrictive environment advocating that all pupils with disabilities be educated in the general education classroom.

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Placement in a general education classroom, with a working partnership between special education teachers and general educators, would result in a better education for all pupils, not just those with special needs, and would occur within the context of the least restrictive environment.

When correctly instituted, full inclusion is characterized by its virtual invisibility. Students with disabilities are not segregated but dispersed into classrooms they would normally attend if they were not disabled. They are seen as full-fledged members of, not merely visitors to, the general education classroom. Special educators provide an array of services and supports in the general education classroom alongside their general education colleagues, often using strategies such as cooperative teaching in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils. Table 2.8 summarizes the key components of most models of full inclusion.

Full inclusion is definitely a controversial topic; even professional organizations have opposing viewpoints. For instance, TASH (formerly The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps) has issued a statement fully supporting inclusion, which it considers to be a national moral imperative. However, the desirability of full inclusion is questioned in some professional circles. The Council for Learning Disabilities, for example, endorses the continuation of service delivery options. The Council for Exceptional Children, the premier professional organization in the field of special education, has also taken a stand on this issue. Its policy statement on full inclusion, adopted in 1993, reads as follows:

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) believes that all children, youth, and young adults with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate education and/or services that lead to an adult life characterized by satisfying relations with others, independent living, productive engagement in the community, and participation in society at large. To achieve such outcomes, there must exist for all children, youth, and young adults with disabilities a rich variety of early



Full inclusion results in students with disabilities being seen as full-fledged members of the general education classroom.

●●●●● TABLE 2.8 Representative Elements of Full Inclusion Models

Model	Description
"Home school" attendance	Defined as the local school the child would attend if he or she did not have a disability.
Natural proportion at the school site	The percentage of children with special needs enrolled in a particular school is in proportion to the percentage of pupils with exceptionalities in the entire school district; in general education classes, this would mean approximately two to three students with disabilities.
Zero rejection	All students are accepted at the local school, including those with severe impairments; pupils are not screened out or grouped separately because of their disability.
Age-/grade-	A full inclusion model calls for serving children with special needs in general education classrooms according