# Parents purposely became learning disabled

By SUSAN TAUBER

Standing as tall as she could in front of an overhead projector, the woman started doing what the teacher asked her to do.

With each stroke of her greasepen, she tried to trace the first letter of the alphabet. Her confidence waned. Her hand moved unsteadily and her face became strained.

She never finished her work.

The man was asked to perform very routine tasks, such as stating his name and telephone number. He said his name correctly.

But when it came to his phone number, he failed.

Sitting in front of the class at a table, another woman was told to follow all the directions given by a voice on a tape.

As the tape rolled, one command followed another. Her nose crinkled as she tried to keep up. She smiled, laughed, said "phooey," and tried again, looking to the teacher for approval.

These three adults represented 50 parents who attended a meeting of the Rochester Schools Special Education Parent Teacher Association.

Special education teachers put them through tasks designed to make them fail. The idea was to let the parents experience what their children, who have learning disabilities, experience at school every day.

It wasn't a pleasant experience.

"HOW DID you feel?" the parents were asked as they tried to perform a given job. Each time, the answers included the words embarrassed, tense, frustrated.

"When we stop this show, you're all going to go back to feeling normal," said Bettie Lewis, one of the teacher-consultants conducting the program.

"The child who has a learning disability never returns to normal. His disability doesn't just affect his school performance, it affects everything he does."

Ms. Lewis, Pam Lesperance and Beth Martin worked for more than an hour putting parents through simulated experiences of different learning disabilities, explaining to the parents what each one involved.

They said that a learning disability is only one of 16 categories under the special education umbrella, adding that learning disabled children usually have average to high IQs.

Other categories of special education include visual, physical and the hearing impaired, the trainable mentally impaired and the emotionally impaired.

"MANY OF us here have learning disabilities," Ms. Martin said. "Vision may be normal, hearing may be normal. When something stimulates one of the senses, the message goes to the brain. That message should make a closed circuit connection with the brain, but for a learning disabled person, that message misses. The messages get mixed."

That's what happened in the first example, when parent Pat Rusher tried to trace a pretend letter on the screen. According to Ms. Martin, the message got garbled.

"In the dark ages, the teacher would provide more exercises for this child — keep her in at recess. This only promotes more frustration, not a better performance," she said.

When Dick Bellaver was asked to repeat his own phone number, he failed because of what he was hearing through the earphones he was wearing — the sound of his own voice, echoing seconds after he spoke.

"This is the best way to simulate expressive language problems," Ms. Lewis said. "These problems are evident when a child can't express a word — when he says 'that thing' for a thumb tack instead of coming up with a synonym."

IN THE THIRD situation, Sylvia Heck couldn't follow the directions from the tape because of taped noise, which got progressively louder and interfered with the directions.

For some learning disabled children, these noises are part of their environment. They can't filter the noises out, Ms. Lewis said, and therefore had a hard time concentrating on what's going on around.

These three examples were written specifically by Ms. Martin and Mrs. Lewis as part of a program for general education teachers.

"This is really 'act one' of a five act road show," said Bob Roy, director of the Department of Special Education for the Rochester Communtiy School District.

"All of the junior high school teachers and Adams High School teachers have seen these programs. We'll be presenting them to all the elementary school teachers and to Rochester High School teachers.

"The purpose," he said, "is to bring about general awareness and understanding of the learning disabled child for all general education teachers."

The programs were developed, according to Roy, because of the recent passage of a federal law, Public Law 94142, that states all handicapped children be mainstreamed to the greatest extent possible into general education classrooms, instead of isolating them in seperate classrooms.

"THIS INFLUENCES EVERY school district in the state because the teachers receiving these handicapped children haven't been prepared to deal with them," Roy said.

"Many teachers are reacting by saying, 'Hey, wait a minute. Do I have to accept this kid?' They have concern and fear if they can handle the child properly," according to Roy, who has his master's degree in guidance and counseling, his doctorate in secondary schools and is completing a second master's in special education.

The simulated learning disability simulated programs are designed to educate teachers. A program was presented to the Special Education PTA to help educate them.

They learned that even though their children have one or more learning disabilities, they are probably trying harder than any children in school to do their work.

"Learning disabled children probably put (more) energy into their reading assignments than any student," said Ms. Lesperance. "You saw how hard you worked at trying to read the stories I gave you," she said, referring to a story that required reading words from right to left, instead of left to right.

"There are three C's to working with learning disabled children," Ms. Martin said. These are correction, compensation and coping.

"SOME LEARNING disabilities are grown out of, some are left behind, others aren't. Many are related to school work and once that child is out of school, he doesn't have to face his learning disability every day. Now he's a grown person with an idiosyncrasy rather than a child with a learning disability."

The parents left with a better idea of what the Rochester Community School District is doing to help their children — using teacher consultants to help regular education teachers understand learning disabilities.

"It's up to the teacher consultants to help teach the teachers, as well as work with the children," said Roy.

There are 34 professional staff members who are teacher consultants, psychologists, social workers or speech pathologists in the Special Education Department, as well as 20 aides. Officers for the Special Education PTA are president Linda Malain, second vice-president Ruth Zarump, treasurer Bea Juble and secretary Joyce Johnston.

This parent tries hard to read a story while experiencing a simulated learning disability. Fortunately, he's able to laugh at his own mistakes. (Staff photos by Mindy Saunders)

Beth Martin, a teacher consultant for Rochester area schools, explains to the Special Education PTA members what a learning disability is.

# Symphony plays at Temple Beth El

Temple Beth El will present the Center Symphony Orchestra at 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 18, in the Helen L. DeRoy sanctuary of the temple.

The program will feature Julius Chajes, conductor; Young-Nam Kim, violinist; Ara Zerounian, violist; Shaul Ben-Meir, flutist; and Marius Fossenkemper, clarinetist.

This will be the first in a series of four concerts sponsored by the Stanley Imerman Memorial Fund of Temple Beth El. The concert is open to the public free of charge. Professor Jason H. Tickton, music director of the temple, is the music coordinator for the series.

Chajes is conductor of the Jewish Community Center Symphony Orchestra and is an internationally known composer and pianist. He was the honor prize winner at the First International Competition for Pianists in Vienna, served as head of the piano department at the Music College in Tel Aviv, and is a part-time member of the faculty of Wayne State University.

He has published numerous compositions now in the repertoire of many musicians. He has conducted in Israel, Europe, Canada and the United States.

Young-Nam Kim, associate professor and artist in residence at Bowling Green University, is from Korea. He has participated in several music festivals, has won numerous prizes and has appeared as soloist in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Houston, Chicago and Detroit.

His European tours include recitals in France, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Holland and Switzerland.

Ben-Meir has been a flutist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra since 1967 and is a member of the Detroit Woodwind Chamber Players. He began his musical training in Israel and has continued in England, France (under Jean Pierre Rampal) and the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y.

He was the principal flutist of the Haifa Symphony Orchestra and a visiting professor of flute at Ithaca College.

Fossenkemper was the solo clarinetist of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for many years. He served under four conductors including Ossip Gabrilowitch and Paul Paray. He also played solo clarinet under the baton of guest conductors Bruno Walter, Fritz Reiner and Eugene Ormandy.

Audrey Spiwak studied for many years with Chajes. She has given many recitals in and about the Detroit area.

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