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EDITORIAL

Recent Reform in Special Education

Education no doubt is an instrument per excellence for individual and national development. The role of education in facilitating individual development has led to Declaration and Resolution such as the UN 1995 Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Salamanca 1994 Declaration; The New Delhi 1994 Declaration and The Education for AU Resolutions.

The above which are the recent efforts towards education for all have brought about the Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria, which seems to be in support of inclusive education. Inclusive education is the commitment where schoolteachers and community commit themselves to resolving and meeting the needs of all learners. In fact Mercer (1997 contributes that inclusive schools are based on the belief that the world is an inclusive community with people who vary not only in terms of disabilities but in race, gender and religious background. Scholars believe that inclusive education is a reform in special education that can bring about functional education for special needs persons.

Unfortunately scholars have diverse opinion as whether inclusion is going to be partial or full. Thus while the radical advocates of inclusion opined that all residential schools, institutions, special schools must be replaced with neighbourhood schools that must include all children in their catchment areas regardless of any disability and severity of such a disability. The conservative supporters of inclusion on the other hand are of the view that disabled persons can be integrated largely but that a full spectrum of placement options ranging from hospital and residential schools to full-time attendance in regular classes in the neighbourhood schools, should also serve for service delivery.

From the on-going and following from the way policy statements and programmes are attended to in Nigeria one is forced to ask a number of questions. These questions include: since inclusive education involves the restructuring of schools to response to diversity in pupils, are schools in Nigeria structured or are in the process of being restructured to meet these needs? Specifically,
Are teachers in the schools equipped to manage the needs of each child in the schools? Are communities ready to accept disabled pupils/persons in their community schools? What about the severely/profoundly impaired in regular schools? Can they be included? Should inclusion be full or partial? The answers to these questions could assist Nigerians in the march towards inclusive education.

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Placement Alternatives for the Educable Mentally Retarded: Inclusion or Segregation

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Abstract
The placement of the educable mentally retarded person has generated a lot of controversy. Is it possible to place the educable mentally retarded in the general education class? Should inclusion or segregation be practiced with the educable mentally retarded? This paper examines the placement alternatives available for the mentally retarded.person. The inclusion debate and the educable mentally retarded persons. It was concluded that the educable mentally retarded should be included in the regular education class with appropriate support for effective teaching and learning.

Introduction

Traditionally, students with mild mental retardation were educated in separate classroom. Children with moderate and severe mental retardation were usually excluded from the local public schools and placed in a special school for children with disabilities. Although the regular public schools are changing their ways of providing services to students with mental retardation, they are doing so, slowly (Heward, 1996).

For many students today, the label 'mental retardation' still results in a placement decision and that such placement is often in a separate class. Even though there is a controversy that children with disabilities can be educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible, not more than one in three students with mental retardation spends all or part of the school day in the regular classroom (Stainback and Stainback 1992).

The U.S.A. Dpartment of Education (1998) observed that during the 1995-1996 school year, only 10% of students with mental retardation were educated in the regular classroom with 29% being served in resource room programme and 54% in separate classroom. In fact, in Nigeria presently, mentally retarded persons are still educated in special schools.

Many students with retardation continue to attend special schools with or without residential facilities. Sometimes a number of small neighbouring schools try to offer special school programme for student with moderate/severe/profound mental retardation. Many special educators today believe however, that separate schools prevent students from obtaining education in the least restrictive environment and that all children should attend their local neighbourhood schools regardless of the type or severity of their disability (Baumag and Giangreco, 1996, Brown, Long, Udvari-Solner, Davis. van Deventer, Ahlgreen, Johnson, Cruenwold and Jorgenese, 1987 and Snell, 1991).

Educational Placement Alternatives for Children with Mental Retardation

Where a child with mental retardation will be placed for instruction is a critical component of the assessment-teaching process. The placement of mentally retarded children has generated hot debates in the field of mental retardation in particular and

special education in general. A growing trend in the schools is to use an inclusive placement model, which means placing children with mental retardation as well as other disabilities, into general education class for instruction. (Stainback and Stainback, 1992).

In order to appreciate the inclusion debate, it is necessary to know certain basic concepts about placements for instructions in special education. The child's placements is determined by the severity of the handicap as established by the diagnosis and stated in the Individualized Educational Programme (IEP). In the written IEP, the type of educational placements, or where the child will receive services, is determined. The Special Education Law (Individual with Disabilities Act) stipulates two important conditions relating to the placement of a child in a setting for learning instruction (Lerner, 1997; Oslon and Platt, 1992). These are:

- that there should be a continuum of alternative placements made available for the child and parents concerned;
- that learners should be placed in the least restrictive environment.

The continuum of programme or placement alternatives display various placement options which are arranged to render services in relation to the needs of individuals. They include general education class, resource room, separate class, separate school, residential school and home bound/hospital environment and one tone Instruction, (Learner, 1997; Oslon and Pratt 1992; Yeseldyke and Algozzine, 1990).

General Education Class: This refers to the practice of educating children with mental retardation in a general education classroom. This placement requires that the learners will receive special education and related services outside or inside the classroom for not more than 21% of the school day. (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Resource Room: This includes learners who, receive special education and related services outside the general education classroom for at least 21% but not more than 60% of the school day. (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Some children may be fully placed in the resource room and only attend the general classroom on a part-time basis.

Separate Class: This programme includes those learners who receive special education and related services outside the general education classroom for more than 60% of the school day (Learner,1997) . the separate class can be on the same compound or on another compound.

Separate School: This is meant for children whose condition needs specialized methods and instruments. They receive special education for at least 50% of the school day. Smith (1991) noted that severe learning-disabled students perform better in such settings and develop a higher ego and self-concept.

Residential Schools: Learners placed here receive education for more than 50% of the school day in a residential school, on a full-time basis. (U.S. Department of Education 1995). They only go home during vacation. It should also be noted that only severe cases are found in this setting.

Homebound/Hospital Environment: Children usually placed in such a setting are those who have health/medical problems. They will be educated in their home or the hospital for the period the health/medical condition lasts.

One to One Instruction: It is a situation when one adult gives learning, instruction to one learner, Slavin (1991), recommend it as one of the most effective types of teaching. Research has shown that children with mental retardation need this type of instruction (Lerner, 1997, Slavin, Karwit and Wasik, 1994 Bresly and Ranking, Wasik and Slavin, 1993; Kirk, 1986, Bloom, 1984).

Segregation Facilities

Segregation is a way of placing the mentally retarded in environments exclusively for them without any contact with the non-disabled or wider society. Segregation can be effected in settings such as residential institutions, special schools or special classes.

Residential Institutions: Residential facilities usually provide full time placement for the mentally retarded away from their homes. The students receive education in a public or private residential facility for more than fifty percent of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). However few students have severe mental retardation to deserve such placement. In some cases, if the community lacks adequate alternative facilities and if the emotional reaction among members of the family is debilitating due to the severity of the retardation, residential placement on a 24 hour basis may be the best solution for both the student and the family (Learner, 1997).

Although residential institutions are the oldest provision for dealing with children and youth with mental retardation, they have many disadvantages. They move the children and youths from home and neighbourhood, emphasize the child's disability and provide fewer opportunities for social experiences in the larger community. Nowadays there is lesser emphasis on residential placement for the mentally retarded but nonetheless certain mentally retarded individuals especially the severe ones may required residential care.

Special Schools: Special school facilities are established for the mentally retarded. These schools could be private or public schools. Children spend more than 50 percent of the day in a special school. Some children attend the special school on full time basis while others attend only half a day and may spend the balance of the school day in the public school.

The disadvantages of special schools include the high expense on parents, the travelling distance and the lack of opportunity to be with other children for some portion of the school day. However, it also has certain advantages as it serves mentally retarded children more because they enjoy individualized educational programme more than any other one. This could also serve as the ground for referral to regular schools.

Special Class: The special class within the school was one of the first placements used in public schools to provide education to children with mental retardation. Early classes had specially equipped rooms designed to reduce environmental distractions and teaching techniques were highly structured and exciting (Cruickshark, Bentzen, Ratzeburgh and Tannhauser, 1961). Special classes are small

containing about six to fifteen pupils at a time and wide range of materials are available to teachers. It also offers the opportunity for highly individualized and closely supervised intensive instruction. It serves children for more than 60 percent of the day. (Lerner, 1997).

Special classes could be categorical or cross categorical. It is categorical when the mentally retarded are only in the placement while it is cross categorical when it consist of other children with disabilities.

It helps mentally retarded children to develop positive self-concept than those in regular classes because the goal set for them are attainable. Smith (1991) noted that in special classes certain children with mental retardation make greater strides in both academic and social areas. With its lower teacher pupil ratio, this setting offers more intensive and comprehensive intervention needed by children with mental retardation. It also makes children to be more organized for independent learning which can male learning possible in a less restrictive environment. It also gears up placement of children in the general education class.

Inclusion

Most recently, the term inclusive education seems to be the focal point now in special education . It frowns at segregation placement. Some special educators believe that the continuum of services should give way to regular classroom placement for all students with disabilities the educable/mentally retarded inclusive. The idea of special placement for children with mental retardation is phasing out. The trend is moving from institutionalization to deinstitutionalization for the educable/mentally retarded in order for them to live a normal life as far as their disability could allow them (Knight, 1980).

There is yet no clear consensus in the field about the meaning of inclusion. To some, inclusion means full-time placement of all students with disabilities, (the mentally retarded inclusive) into regular classroom; to others, the terms refers to any degree of integration in the mainstream.

Stainback and Stainback (1992), state that leaders of the inclusion movement, define an inclusive school as a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met.

Inclusion is a concept which views children with disabilities as true full-time participants and members of their neighbourhood schools and communities. The idea of inclusion proposes that all students should be educated with their peers in the same physical location (Knight 1999).

Incusionists believe that inclusive schools are based on the belief that the world is an inclusive community with people who vary not only in terms of disabilities but in race, gender and religious background (Mercer, 1997). With inclusion, students come to the regular classroom with all the specialized services they require. Every child has unique learning needs requiring an educational programme implemented to take into account the wide diversity of their characteristics and needs.

Inclusive Education and the Mentally Retarded

Many systems have been proposed for classifying mental retardation by type or degree of serverity. Mental retardation has traditionally been classified by the degree or level of intellectual impairment, as measured by an intelligence quotient test. The most widely used classification cited in the professional literature consists of four levels of mental retardation according to the range of intelligence quotient scores. Educators use different terms for the various levels of mental retardation. For many years, students with mental retardation were classified as either educable mentally retarded or mildly mentally retarded with an intelligence quotient of 50-70, trainable mentally retarded or moderately mentally retarded with an intelligence quotient of 25-50 and the severely and profoundly mentally retarded with an intelligence quotient of 0-25 (Kirk, 1972).

Of these three categories of the mentally retarded, the mildly mentally retarded can effectively cope with inclusive education. The mildly mentally retarded can develop social and communication skills. They also have nominal retardation in sensory areas and are often not distinguished from normal until later age. They can also learn academic skills up to the sixth grade level, by late teen and can be guided towards social conformity (Mba, 1995). This category of children with mild retardation have traditionally been educated in self contained classroom in the public schools. Today, many children with mild mental retardation are being educated in regular classrooms with a special educator helping the classroom teacher with individualized instruction for the child and providing extra tutoring in a resource room as needed (Heward, 1996).

Advocates of full inclusion believe that schools should have two essential and related goals for children with disabilities:

- To improve their social competence and acceptance
- To change the attitudes of teachers and students without disabilities.

They believe that this can happen only when special needs students are placed in mainstream or integrated settings. The rationale for educating students with mental retardation in integrated settings is to ensure their normalized community participation by providing them instruction in the skills essential to their need in the social settings in which they will ultimately use these skills (Gartger and Lipsky, 1987).

It is believed that by placing the educable mentally retarded in the integrated setting, they would be able to function adequately socially since they lag behind in adaptive behaviour. By the time, they mixed up with non-disabled children, they would be able to function well socially and the level of acceptance by those who are not disabled would also be heightened.

It follows therefore that any placement outside the regular classroom is inappropriate and the principle of least Restrictive Environment and the entire continuum of special education placements must be rejected. Therefore, full inclusionists advance a policy whereby literally retarded are not left out in this.

The idea of placing the educable mentally retarded in the same class with their non-disabled counterparts is necessary for two major reasons. Firstly, special education historically has served as general education's dumping ground; special education has made it too easy for classroom teachers to rid themselves of their

undesirables and unteachables. Secondly, children with severe disabilities are frequently viewed by classroom teachers as the most undesirable and unteachable pupils, only by abolishing resource rooms, separate classes and special schools with regular educators be forced to deal with those students they have avoided.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is that inclusive education could be practised with the educable mentally retarded. This is possible because they are the only category of the mentally retarded that can benefit from educational settings in both regular and special classes. Since the educable mentally retarded are the only group of the retarded that are academically oriented, inclusive education would also go a long way to enhance them academically and also boost their self-esteem as they could learn in the same setting as their regular peers.

This paper opines that inclusive education for the mentally retarded helps in integrating general special education. It helps to bring children with different disabilities together with their regular peers. This will make the non-disabled counterpart to appreciate the nature of disability and learn to live with them.

Inclusive Education for the mentally retarded would help to eliminate labels for these children. Labelling often leads to stigmatization and segregation but once everybody is in the same class, the idea of segregation would be eliminated.

In order to make inclusion placement more effective it is essential that provision should be made through multidisciplinary teams of professionals (who mutually adjust their collective skills and knowledge) to create unique personal programmes for the educable mentally retarded children.

In practicing inclusive education for the educable mentally retarded, the child and the family must be considered, teacher's interest should be aroused, adequate resources and support must be provided, continuum of services must be developed as well as the development of professionals.

For inclusion to be successful for the educable mentally retarded children there must be a follow up after placement and the progress of the child must be evaluated.

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