

COUNSELING AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR ENCOURAGING THE HANDICAPPED TO BENEFIT FROM EDUCATION IN REGULAR SCHOOLS

DR. P.S.E. EZEH

Department of Educational Foundations
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu
And

DR. EZE H.O

Department of Foundations of Education IMT Enugu

ABSTRACT

Right from the time of introduction of guidance and counseling as a school service it was assumed that the functions of school counselors limit them to offering services to normal students with normal problems. Handicapped students with their peculiar problems were catered for by special teachers and special schools. As time passed, the segregation of the handicapped came under severe criticism. It was considered more socially acceptable to educate the handicapped in regular schools since they are part and parcel of the society. Following this development, the handicapped became integrated into regular schools. However, available evidence shows that these handicapped who are generally stigmatized find it difficult to adjust in these regular schools. Thus it becomes the added responsibility of counselors to serve this special population since in the regular schools there are no special educators to cater for them. This paper has therefore highlighted some of the problems of the handicapped and the counseling procedures for encouraging them to benefit from education in regular schools.

Keywords: Counseling, Instrument, Encouraging, Handicapped Benefits.

INTRODUCTION

The general view of school counselors in Nigeria is that their role limits them to counseling normal people with normal problems. Consequently, they regard handicapped people as a special group that requires special treatment by those who have been specifically trained to serve such a population.

However, with the increasing emphasis on equal educational opportunities for all children as well as on integrating the handicapped into regular schools, counselors are therefore obliged to provide services not only for the so called normal people with normal problems but also to the handicapped.

Strategies for counseling the handicapped to benefit from education in regular schools and live happier lives should be sought. Counselors must be concerned with developing techniques and procedures that will facilitate counseling for both the normal and handicapped students in our schools. This is necessary because the educational and psychological needs of normal and handicapped children must all be catered for in order to attain the objectives of equal educational opportunities for all children.

WHO ARE THE HANDICAPPED?

The handicapped in our society include a wide range of people with various forms of impairments which prevent them from participating in various activities in life just as other normal people without such impairments. These include the physically handicapped (speech, visual auditory and orthopedic), mentally retarded, the learning disabled, and the socially maladjusted. Meanwhile no specialist definition of the handicapped has been given so that the non-specialist readers might equally benefit.

For the purpose of this paper, the handicapped will comprise those handicapped persons that can be successfully integrated into regular schools. These include the physically handicapped such as the hard of hearing, partially sighted, speech impaired and orthopedically impaired. Others are the educable (mildly or moderately) mentally retarded, the learning disabled and the socially maladjusted. This category of people can, with some extra assistance benefit from education in our regular schools.

THE PLIGHT OF THE HANDICAPPED

The attitudes and feelings which normal people have towards handicapped people are quite of negative. The handicapped are easily stigmatized and slighted. Goffman (1963) describes a stigmatize person as a person who might have been received easily in ordinary intercourse, but who possesses trait that obtrudes itself upon attention, and turns those he meets away from him. This clearly indicates that the society generally views the handicapped in a negative light.

In a study Denga (1982a) found that the labels of stigma which fellow students, teachers, school administrators and the general public place on handicapped students serve as the basic source frustration, anger, negative self concept, low motivation, dependency, hostility to others and a source of futility among handicapped students. In another study Denga (1982b) observed that fellow students, teachers and administrators do not perceive handicapped students as being intelligent as their normal counterparts. There was a general feeling that the handicapped should not have equal education opportunities as their normal counterparts. Furthermore, they

should neither be allowed to marry a handicapped person nor have equal chances of being employed with the non-handicapped.

In like manner, Uba (1982) observes that handicapped persons in Nigeria are characterised failures, inhibitions, fears, distrust, isolation, lack of self confidence, anxiety, inability to grow in esteem in a rejecting, labeling society like ours and consequently lack of full social adjustment predominates. Even parents of handicapped children often develop unhealthy attitudes towards handicap of their children. They often manifest guilt feelings and sometimes an overt rejection of children no matter how well disguised.

So far evidences have shown that handicapped persons are perceived in a negative light. But handicapped children should perceive themselves as objects of stigmatization and ridicule, they likely to develop negative self concept, frustration, anger and dejection which will adversely affect their academic attainment and retard their social and psychological growth. School counselors, therefore have significant roles to play in order to improve the lot of the handicapped.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS ROLE IN ENCOURAGING THE HANDICAPPED TO BENEFIT FROM EDUCATION IN REGULAR SCHOOLS.

Bearing in mind the problems of the handicapped and the emphasis on integrating them regular schools where special education experts are generally absent, it now becomes the responsibility of school counselors who now bear the role function of all the special education consultancy teachers offer necessary assistance to ensure that this category of students benefit from such schools. That before the case; the following areas need the counselor's involvement to ensure they benefits maximally for their integration into regular schools.

1. Counseling Intervention:

School counselors should assist the handicapped to explore their handicapping conditions accept the reality of their disability so as to reduce their frustrations, anger, fear, and self desire.

The basic goal of this effort is to enable the handicapped students to integrate their disability, their self concept. *Koln and Woldt (1976)* suggest the following strategies which councilors employ to enable the handicapped deal with their body image.

- A. Enabling the client to contact their physique through fantasy, self exploration, psychodrama modified body movement patterns. These can be achieved by focusing on areas where seasion is blocked and where it is capable of being perceived. Exercise in body awareness will help client to analyses each part of the body and point out strengths and weaknesses of each part how each

part could be used to enhance behaviour. Physical education exercises designed for purpose could prove very useful.

- B. Cognitively – Based approaches like Albert Ellis rational emotive therapy can also be used to help the handicapped to become rational and behave more rational toward their condition and their interaction with others as well. A rational self analysis will prove useful in helping clients to accept themselves and what they are. Counseling intervention, therefore, should be high emphasis in order to help the handicap develop positive self concept and high achievement motivation.

2. Placement In Appropriate Schools:

The secondary school into which the handicapped student is integrated and his academic and vocational programmes should not be left to chance or factors like persuasion, proximity to home etc. Academic and psychological assessment of the student's academic and non-academic spheres provides invaluable information for determining appropriate placement and academic and vocational programming at the post-primary level. Appropriate academic and psychological assessment should be performed by guidance and counseling personnel.

3. Facilitating the Acceptance of the Handicapped In the Mainstream:

After the appropriate placement of the handicapped, the counselor should facilitate his acceptance in the mainstream in order to minimize the stigmatization or his being labelled as handicapped, retarded etc. The social acceptance of the handicapped within the mainstream, as well as his more appropriate placement and meaningful academic and vocational programming, will increase the probability of the student's feeling of self worth and his ability to succeed and to become a productive member of society (*Denga 1982, M.S.S.B. Reports 1982*).

4. Facilitating The Cultivation of Positive Self Image:

It is well known that positive self image is at least as important in determining academic success and vocational productivity as is intellectual potential (*M.S.S.B. Reports, 1982*). Counselors should create environments that maximize individual needs and styles and that foster acceptance and positive interpersonal relationships. Because of the limited intellectual potential of the majority of the handicapped and also because of their physical, emotional and behavioral handicaps, their academic achievement are often limited. Feeling of success and self worth based only on academic competence are therefore inappropriate and defeating. Counselors should help to develop for handicapped students meaningful academic and vocational programmes that would include the development of self care, life skills, assertiveness training, social and recreational skills as well as the vocational training for occupations that are personally meaningful and socially relevant.

5. Facilitating Social Acceptance of the Handicapped:

The social acceptance of the handicapped by peers, teachers, administrators should be facilitated by the counselor's efforts to sensitize others to the needs of special students and to encourage them to assume responsibility in meeting these. Positive attitudes of acceptance of the handicapped by their normal peers can be fostered by prepared exposure as well as by a variety of activities such as role playing, values clarification, group problem solving and guidance and through audio visual programmes that focus on attitude change and that present the handicapped as sharing basic human needs, feelings and experiences as productive members of the society. Knowledge and shared experiences facilitate the removal of stigmatization preconceptions.

6. Ensuring That The Handicapped Is Not Lost In The Mainstream:

Just placing the handicapped in the mainstream is not enough. In order to ensure that the handicapped is not forgotten or lost in the mainstream, the counselor should maintain an on-going contact with him through continuous assessment, curriculum planning and programme modification as well as through on-going vocational and personal social counseling.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In view of the importance attached to the issue of integrating some categories of handicapped children into the regular schools, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counselor training programmes in Nigeria should be broadened to include courses in counseling services for the disabled since the need and demand for counselors who will provide counseling services for both normal and handicapped children has increased.
2. Counselors should assist the handicapped to combat the psychological battle in which they are engaged by acting as friends and surrogate parents to these less fortunate individuals.
3. School counselors should be actively involved in the following aforementioned strategies aimed at the successful integration of the handicapped into our regular schools.
 - a. Counseling intervention for the handicapped.
 - b. Placement of the handicapped in appropriate schools.
 - c. Facilitating the acceptance of the handicapped in the mainstream and
 - d. Ensuring that the handicapped are not lost in the mainstream.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, therefore, the school counselor has an important role to play in the development of an educational system that programmes for all students including the handicapped. All students, particularly the handicapped should be exposed to experience would encourage the development of such values as feelings of self worth, respect for

self and others, an appreciation and acceptance of individual differences and an awareness of individual responsibility for their own learning, for productivity and independent living. In the education of the handicapped, particular care must be taken to nurture positive attitudes which would ensure the development of meaningful and quality education.

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