

Social and Vocational Integration of Special Needs Students

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Abstract: As we approach a new age of inclusion and diversity regarding other groups of people that are discriminated against because of ethnicity, religion, gender and so forth, we must not exclude people that also need help from the community they live in: people with special needs. In order for these people to properly function as members of the society they live in they must be helped in their most critical stages of preparation prior to becoming active in a work field.

Keywords: inclusion; integration; diversity; special needs; learning disability; education

1. Introduction

“Successful implementation of diversity in education requires a special effort to respond to the special educational needs (SEN) of students. Schools generally tend to place priority on acquisition of academic knowledge but rarely make provision for activities designed to foster socio-affective development of special needs students”(Cambra, 2003). A general disregard for special needs students because of the lack of experience and professional training regarding the special needs field is affecting the early stages of integration for students. The students are getting used to the idea that they do not belong, that they are a nuisance and they become closed off so that when they get the help they need, they refuse it.

“Pupils with special needs can have difficulties in building relationships with peers in inclusive education. An important condition for developing positive relationships with peers is having the age-group appropriate social skills. It seems likely that pupils with an insufficient set of social skills face a larger risk of being excluded”

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(Frostad, 2007). Generally, the lack or the presence of social skills depends on the environment the students come from.

“Teachers’ attitudes were found to be strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them (child-related variables) and less by teacher-related variables. Further, educational environment-related variables, such as the availability of physical and human support, were consistently found to be associated with attitudes to inclusion” (Avramidis, 2002). Frustration is a real problem among people working with special needs students and it can lead to burnout and dissatisfaction at the workplace.

“Teachers of students in special education programs were found to be the most dissatisfied. Specific stresses and frustrations, both from within and from outside the classroom, were found to be associated with the dissatisfaction. The difficulties were particularly common in younger, less experienced special education teachers” (Stempien, 2002).

“A full range of transition services are now available to eligible individuals with learning disabilities through vocational rehabilitation agencies in each state. However, the differences in professional jargon and the academic focus of special education versus the employment outcome emphasis of vocational rehabilitation (VR) have created roadblocks to collaboration between these two agencies” (Dowdy, 1996).

“Findings show that there are various challenges faced by students with special needs while undergoing training at the workplace. Among the challenges face by students with special needs are problem of adapting to the working environment, communication skills, difficulty to understand instruction, students’ attitude completing task, relationships at the workplace and perception towards special needs students” (Zainal, Yassin, & Tahar, 2019).

The social and the vocational integration are tightly related, as they have a massive influence in people’s lives, denoting the most valuable assets of a person well integrated into society and thus representing the goal of many special needs students. The failure in these areas of life can bring upon the special needs people even more frustration regarding their disabilities.

“Students with special needs are perceived as less efficient at and less competent in coping with learning and work tasks.

These students are not familiar with effective methods and strategies for successful learning, which leads to the feelings of frustration and helplessness in case of failure. In order to cultivate an effective and supportive educational environment for students with special needs, shortterm vocational schools should develop learning/teaching models that provide a potentially powerful alternative to traditionally directed teaching approaches.” (Schmidt, 2010).

2. Downsides of Integration of Special Needs Students

“Inclusionary practices may appease critics, but have actually caused a decline in rigorous academic options for high achievers. Mainstreamed gifted kids have fewer chances to challenge one another. Full inclusion for all special-needs students is tomorrow’s bad practice.

Programs featuring flexibility, acceleration, and variety are promising alternatives” (Delisle, 1999). I have personally witnessed the effects of inclusion on the “gifted kids”. These “high achievers” were often paired with a special needs student in order to help the latter get assignments done. This practice can often slow down the gifted kids by separating them from their colleagues and thus eliminating competition; without competition there is no way a kid can evolve in a classroom.

3. Solutions

“Factors that affected inclusion included: characteristics of teachers, classroom environment, school climate, cooperation, support from people with competence, attitudes and resources” (Flem, 2000).

Even though a positive attitude can really help boost the efficacy of people working with special needs students, it is not enough. Because of the interference of other factors, like the ones mentioned above, it is difficult to truly accept and integrate special needs students in such a way that they feel validated. Also, many problems stem from the stigmatization of people with special needs. By being near or by wanting to help special needs people, we might be perceived as “stubborn”, like fighting for “a lost cause” and so on.

These kinds of presumptions are picked up from the environment a person comes from and are carried further by fear of the things we can not fully understand, by our

own ignorance. The first step into escaping this type of conditioning is by educating ourselves and other people.

4. Conclusions

Inclusion is a well promoted practice nowadays because of the diverse world we live in, but it might not be the best practice regarding the special needs students. First of all, inclusion of the special needs students among the normal students might confuse the teachers, especially the ones with less experience, who can sometimes end up accumulating frustrations at the workplace. Secondly, the presence of special needs students in a classroom can disrupt the learning process for advanced students, again causing frustration and even rejection of the former. Due to the high costs of training for special needs professionals and programs, the integration seems like a good alternative, only if it is done right, by open minded people and supported by the community.

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