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MAINSTREAMING VS REVERSED MAINSTREAMING "THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA"

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Mainstreaming Vs Reversed Mainstreaming. "The way forward for Nigeria". The concept of mainstreaming, its advantages and disadvantages were discussed. Factors necessary for effective mainstreaming of the handicapped in Nigeria were highlighted. The paper also stressed the need for in-service education of regular teachers for mainstreaming to succeed in Nigeria. Useful recommendations, which would give impetus to mainstreaming of the handicapped in Nigeria for greater success were also given.

Introduction

The proper beginning of special education in Nigeria could be traced to the period when the Government focused its attention on the concept of mainstreaming. The National Policy on Education (1981;1998) states.:

Government has decided that integration is the most realistic form of special education since handicapped children are eventually expected to live in the society. Therefore it has already accepted that special classes and units will be provided in the ordinary schools under the Universal Primary Education scheme. These will be well staffed and equipped... (section 8, sub-section 56, 5)

This shows that integration has become the central focus of concern in special education in Nigeria. In spite of the wide spread advocacy of mainstreaming in Nigeria, many educationalists view it with mixed feelings. Many teachers in ordinary schools feel that they lack necessary competence to educate children with special needs. Under the prevailing arrangements of mainstreaming children with special needs, it has become clear that individual children's needs are not being met as they should be. However, some children with special needs are solemnly taken care of at child centres. The current trend should be to deal with the context in which handicapped children are educated.

CONCEPT OF MAINSTREAMING

The word "mainstreaming" is a common terminology being used in the field of special education. It is the system of grouping non-handicapped children with handicapped children in the same classroom and/or the same school for the purpose of instruction or socialization. It is, the opposite of segregating handicapped children in special classrooms or special schools. Abang (1981) defines mainstreaming as the assigning of handicapped children to ordinary schools or classes and providing special education for them under normal educational arrangements. According to her, mainstreaming refers to the temporary, instructional and social integration of eligible exceptional children with normal peers based



on an ongoing, individually determined, educational planning programming process, and requires clarification of responsibility among regular and special education administrative, instructional and supportive personnel.

Looking critically at the above definitions of mainstreaming, it is clear that the terms indicated as far as it is humanly possible that handicapped children and young people should share the opportunities for self-fulfillment enjoyed by other people. The terms are to conceptualize alternatives to segregated special schooling. Also, it stresses the importance of the child's level of functioning, the capability to be mainstreamed, the necessity for educational planning and clarification of responsibilities.

Similarly Warnock (1978) stressed that mainstreaming is the principle of educating the handicapped and non-handicapped children together, which is described as interaction. Mainstreaming for the handicapped means a thousand things. It means the absence of segregation. It means social acceptance. It means being able to be treated like everybody else. It means the right to work, to go to cinemas, to enjoy outdoor sports, to have a family life, a social life and a love life, to contribute materially to the community, to have the usual choices of association, to be educated up to the University level with one's un-handicapped peers, to travel without fuss on public transport (Warnock, 1978). What the above outline suggests is that of eliminating totally or reducing the various distances between the handicapped and the normal through physical, social and functional forms of mainstreaming.

According to Ozoji (1993), mainstreaming is joining the setting where majority others are found, being a party to what majority others are engaged. From the description given by Ozoji, it means a school placement option in which the handicapped are desegregated from special schools and educated along with their peers in the regular schools.

The council for exceptional children in 1975 defined mainstreaming in terms of what it is. According to the council, mainstreaming is:

- a. Providing the most appropriate education for each child in the least restrictive setting
- b. Focusing at the educational needs of children instead of diagnostic labels such as mentally handicapped, learning disabled, physically handicapped, hearing impaired, gifted and so on.
- c. Looking for creative alternatives that will help general educators serve children with learning or adjustment problems in regular school settings. Some approaches being used to achieve this are: consulting teachers, methods and materials, specialists, itinerant teachers and so on.
- d. Uniting the skills of general education and special education so that all children may have equal educational opportunity.

Mainstreaming provides educational settings where children are first and foremost seen as unique individuals. Public Law 94-142 (Education for all handicapped children) states:



...For each handicapped child, there will be an individualized written education programme (IWEP) a written statement jointly developed by a qualified school official, the child's teacher and parents or guardian and if possible by the child himself. This written statement will include an analysis of the child's present achievement level, a list of both short range and annual goals, or identification of specific service that will be provided towards meeting those goals and an indication of the extent to which the child will be able to participate in the regular school programme... A notation of when these services will be provided and how long they will last, a schedule for checking on the progress being achieved under the plan and for making any revisions in it that may seem called for. Under this programme, teachers in the regular classrooms adapt instructional materials and procedures in accordance to their academic level.

TYPES OF MAINSTREAMING

Mainstreaming can be organized in a number of ways to take care of needs of handicapped children. The organization alternatives could be:

Total Mainstreaming: this is the system whereby handicapped children learn side by side with their non- handicapped classmates in a school for the non- handicapped and they are often taught by regular classroom teachers.

Partial Mainstreaming: in this system both handicapped and non- handicapped learn in the same environment but the handicapped children are taken to resource room for individual assistance by trained personnel. Necessary equipment, materials and aids are at the disposal of handicapped children in the resource room. Usually the child goes to the resource room for those subjects that the regular teacher is incompetent to teach after which the child returns to the regular classroom to continue his/her instruction.

Social Mainstreaming: This refers to a situation the handicapped child receives educational instruction in the same environment with their 'normal' hearing peers with deferring method. They interact during social activities like games, sports, and other recreational activities. This programme promises a lot of special advantages for the handicapped child, provided the school is prepared before hand to accept handicapped children.

Reversed Mainstreaming: this is a system whereby non- handicapped are put in the same learning environment in a special school. (Mba, 1991) Also, Kauffmann & Gfflueb Gioffleb (1978) postulated that mainstreaming have three components: temporal, instructional and social. Temporal mainstreaming is the component, which specifies the amount of time a handicapped child spends in the regular classroom and special class or resource room for other special needs, which can only be attended to by specialists.

Instructional mainstreaming, according to Mba (1991), deals with the handicapped children's participation in regular classroom instructional activities both indoor and outdoor activities, whereas, social mainstreaming is the component that determines the social acceptance of the child by the non- handicapped children at play time, eating and any group activities. Obviously, the social status of a child can be determined through teacher preference, peer acceptance or any other socio-metric measures to ensure their full integration into the fabric of the society in which they grow as adults to live.

Finally, whatever forms of mainstreaming is to be adopted the most essential thing is to ensure that the child being mainstreamed benefit in whole from the activities provided in that setting.



This is based on the premise that mainstreaming in all its ramification should cater for the unique need of the handicapped child.

ADVANTAGES OF MAINSTREAMING

Many observations have been made on the importance of mainstreaming in the holistic development of the handicapped child. Mba (1985;1992) observed that mainstreaming handicapped children into the fabric of the society make them gain much more from being isolated. Mainstreaming indeed, enables handicapped children to understand one another and live together in the adult world. It increases self determination and minimizes unnecessary dependence on other people.

It provides an opportunity to choose both handicapped and non-handicapped children as friends. Mainstreaming of handicapped children has a good opportunity of learning desirable behaviors in natural environment by interacting with their non-handicapped peers. The handicapped child is prepared early to adapt to realities of life and moves away from the sheltered environment of the special or residential school for the handicapped.

Mainstreaming is a Public Relations Strategy

Any practitioner in special education must be familiar with one of the major problems confronting provision of services, which is the negative attitude of people towards the handicapped. The public in most cases has low ratings for the handicapped. This situation is usually a product of unscientific mode of explaining disability. Educating the handicapped in the mainstreamed or regular school will then expose them, their abilities and limitations to the non-handicapped participants in the school process and by extension, the community.

It is Cost Saving

Education of the handicapped children in the regular school reduces overhead cost. According to Abang (1981) and Ayo (1991), mainstreaming is administratively convenient, as there would be no need for separate school plants, since all children are housed in the same building with the teacher using the same quality of chalk in unnecessary duplication of costs.

It Promotes Social Mainstreaming and Effectiveness in the Handicapped. One of the major aims of educating a child is to make him a competent individual in the society. Thus the child is being prepared for social participation. There is then no point in isolating him from the mainstream of the society for which he is being prepared. Mainstreaming encourages cultural understanding in handicap children. Cultural understanding on its own is a necessary condition for social participation and effectiveness since the child is educated along side his peers in the community. Opportunity therefore abounds for him to learn on continues basis the norms and values of his community thus becoming socially active. (Mba, 1991)

DISADVANTAGES OF MAINSTREAMING

The many advantages of mainstreaming discussed above notwithstanding, mainstreaming also has its own weak points. The following points illustrate the disadvantages of mainstreaming:



Negative Attitudes of the Teachers

Negative attitude of the teacher could influence the non-handicapped children to isolate or despise the handicapped children.

Lack of Supportive Services

Many handicapped children in regular classes need one kind of support service or another. Where such services are not provided, the handicapped child may be further handicapped academically or socially.

Faking Behaviour by the Handicapped Children

The handicapped children could give the impression that they are coping up (so as to avoid ridicule or embarrassment from mates and teacher) when in fact they are behind, due to limitations imposed by their disability.

Overcrowded Nature of Regular Classrooms

Most of our regular schools have classes, which are too large to permit the teacher to give individual attention to children who need it. Lack of individualization of instruction, which is the bedrock of special education, place most handicapped children at a disadvantage in regular classrooms.

Labelling the Handicapped Children

The deaf or blind children mainstreamed in a regular school may be labelled as deaf, or blind instead of using their real name to call them. (Ozoji, 1993)

ADVANTAGES OF REVERSED MAINSTREAMING

A handicapped child and his parents are assured that their children are receiving quality education. Adaptations and techniques needed by the handicapped are provided without limiting opportunities of the handicapped.

Socialization is greatly enhanced.

It save building cost

The handicapped learn rules and regulation that are formulated by the society.

DISADVANTAGES OF REVERSED MAINSTREAMING

Teachers are apt to forget the special needs of the handicapped members of their classes. Attitudes of the teacher could influence the non-handicapped children to despise the handicapped.

FACTORS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAMING

For mainstreaming to be a success, Abang (1981) and Ozoji (1993) postulated that the handicapped child himself and the school where the child is to be mainstreamed should be considered.

The Handicapped Child Himself

We need to consider the psychological make up and adjustment capability of each individual child who is proposed for mainstreaming before he/she is actually mainstreamed. There are children who would benefit educationally and socially in a mainstreamed situation and there are others who would be at total loss in such an educational



setting. A child who gets upset for no apparent reason, who perhaps throw objects at other children when upset, may not benefit in such educational setting but would make learning difficult, if not impossible for other children in the class. Also, the level of the child's handicapping condition would need to be considered. A child who is deaf and blind would need special teaching techniques and materials, which are not generally available in the regular schools. The presence of his additional handicap would determine whether the child should be mainstreamed or not. (Abang, 1981)

The School

The school can play a vital role in the successful operation of any handicapped child. The readiness of the Headmaster or principal of the school and his staff members on the commencement of such a program determines the success or failure of mainstreaming in that school. Unless the Headmaster or principal of the school and his staff members are prepared to work together in harmony, mainstreaming in that school will be a failure.

Curriculum Planning

The planner of the curriculum and teachers should develop a curriculum that will meet the demands of mainstreaming in the regular school programme and at the same time without detriment to the quality of education offered to other children in the school.

As for teaching methodology, an individualized method of instruction is emphasized and planning for this is not easy considering the various categories of handicapped children to be catered for. For instance, in a class, there may be a blind child who will depend more on tactual objects to compensate for loss of sight, the deaf child who need sign language and the educable mentally retarded child for whom you will need to repeat every step of what you are doing, or the autistic child whom you will need to reward for every little bit of progress he makes before you can go forward. There may be the hyperactive learning disabled child whom you need to watch closely so that his disordered behaviour will not affect other children in the class. Unless these unique needs are satisfied the handicapped child may be deprived in some aspects. The curriculum developed should be consistent with the philosophy of normalization. Also, it should reflect the needs of the individual child within his home and community environment. (Ozaji, 1993)

Barriers

Another factor that may determine the success or failure of mainstreaming in our schools is the problem of barriers. These are psychological barriers and architectural barriers. Abang (1981) defined barriers as artificial ways of enhancing or encouraging the isolation of handicapped people. These barriers must be removed in the community. Psychological barriers refer to the way and manner in which people think, act, and react towards handicapped people and the manner in which handicapped people perceive them. Majority of our people still maintain the notion that handicapped people can never achieve the same academic level as 'normal' people. Also when a person is brought up to form a negative opinion of himself through the process of conditioning, it becomes difficult to recondition that individual to reverse his opinion of himself (Abang, 1981)

According to Abang (1981), most buildings in our high institutions of learning are not built with the handicapped in mind. The school environment should be engineered so that



handicapped children with different problems may be accommodated. The provision of ramps, elevators, escalators, broad corridors, adequate furniture and lighting are all aspects of the instructional environment that must be prepared to accept the handicapped.

Resource Room Services

Abang (1981) said that a resource room is specially equipped with modern teaching equipment and materials and with one or more specialist teachers, who are available to offer educational support. These children register in the ordinary classes and only spend a portion of the day in a resource room with the specialist teacher. The children come to this room at the schedule time to get specific needs met by specialists in their area of difficulty. The resource teacher diagnosis the child's problems and tells the ordinary classroom teacher in whose room the child spends most of the school day. The purpose of a resource room is to provide a peerless convenience in the regular school where the handicapped child would conveniently return. For assistance, whenever the classroom situation proved unhelpful or problematic, it is easy to see the self-defeat that would have become the lot of the handicapped child if the resource room facility is absent in the school.

The Itinerant Teacher's Service

The itinerant teachers programme is similar to that of the resource teacher diagnosing the child's problem and on the basis of the diagnosis develops an educational strategy and transfers the educational package to the classroom teacher into whose class the child is integrated. The classroom teacher then supervises the child's progress, to see if the intervention is appropriate for the child or needs to be changed or modified (Abang, 1981). For example, a blind child who is registered in the regular class could be taken out for short periods. The itinerant teacher differs from the resource teacher in that he travels among two or more schools particularly those with resource rooms but no resource teachers.

Attitude Change

Attitude change is as important as any of the prerequisites for effective mainstreaming. If the attitude of teachers, pupils, and headmasters towards the handicapped child is positive, mainstreaming will work well in such schools. This is because mainstreaming means closer contact between the handicapped and their school peers, a situation that may be difficult to achieve if attitude of rejections, lower status imposition, and shame prevail in our school system. All these need to be reversed in the interest of the handicapped child.

Each handicapped child who is a candidate for mainstreaming should be carefully evaluated to determine his areas of strength and weakness and the effects which mainstreaming is likely to have on his academic progress and social development. Efforts should also be initiated by our school system across the country to provide basic supportive services in regular schools so that handicapped children can attend their neighbourhood schools, (Ozoji, 1993).

IMPLICATIONS

The Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (1981,1998) states that mainstreaming is the most realistic form of special education and that as soon as possible or feasible, all teacher training colleges should provide general and basic courses to teachers who would teach in normal schools but required such knowledge to identify and



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