

Integration: An American Perspective

Public Law 94-142 passed in the United States in 1975, guaranteed a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment to all children with disabilities. Studies over the last fifteen years have shown that the application of the law has been problematic and challenging.

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Some of the major issues related to integration in the United States other than philosophical, may be summed up conveniently into two categories: one is the legal issue; and the other is the educational issue.

LEGAL ISSUES: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTEGRATION

One of the major external pressures for change arose from the legal provisions and court rulings: the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which assured the individual's rights to personal liberty and equality of opportunity, Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975) and its amendment, Public Law 99-457 (1986) which guaranteed a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environments. The integration movement was first formed during the 1950s as an extension of the civil rights movement, slowly entering the arena of public school education, giving way to numerous court decisions and legislation supporting persons with disabilities (Wood, 1989).

Recognized as a landmark in compulsory special education law, Public Law 94-142 (1975) was designed to meet four major purposes: (1) To guarantee that special education services are available to children who need them; (2) to ensure that decisions about providing services to students with disabilities are made in fair and appropriate ways; (3) to set clear management and auditing requirements and procedures for special education at all levels of government; (4) to provide federal funds to help states educate students with disabilities. Public Law 99-457 (1986), amendments to Public Law 94-142, requires states to provide a free, appropriate public education for children aged from 3 to 5 years by the school year 1990-1991. In addition, these amendments provide grants to states for offering interdisciplinary

teaching practices (Gersten and Woodward, (1990) listed nine, and Hallahan and Kauffman, (1988) listed eleven key findings from research on effective teaching of low-performing students), using teacher consultants, establishing pre-referral teams, setting up cooperative learning situations, using peer tutors, and using commercially available curriculum materials designed to change the attitudes of the non-handicapped (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The third question deals with the amount and types of academic and social learning outcomes on the part of the students with disabilities in relation to the learning outcomes of the nondisabled peers. Particular attention is paid to the satisfactory level of social mingling of the students with disabilities with their nondisabled counterparts. In addition to academic readiness, many studies highlight social competence and a low tendency to be disruptive as important prerequisites to integration (Salend and Salend, 1986.) Racial and cultural diversity of the students not only has profound impact on the development, implementation and revision of the educational programs but also has legal and political implications. A survey of 377 adults at a small city shopping mall showed attitudinal differences based on their race, age and child in school (Berryman, 1989).

Studies also found that the social integration of students with disabilities depends on the attitudes and efforts of teachers (Yager, 1985) and therefore, teachers must create opportunities for children with disabilities to interact with their nondisabled peers (Fitzgerald, 1985). However, this type of teacher intervention initially only had positive effects; these effects lessened or reversed as the teacher continued to intervene. This may suggest that intervention should be gradually withdrawn once positive interactions are established (Cole, 1986). There is some indication that the transition to regular classes may be more successful when children with disabilities are integrated early. A survey of teachers of newly integrated students with disabilities showed that while the teachers were in general satisfied with children's academic and behavioural progress, their satisfaction declined after grade 6 (Schneider and Byrne, 1984).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE: TEACHER ATTITUDES

One of the major issues concerning the education of children with disabilities in the future is whether, and in what ways, general and special educators will be able to work together. Many failures of integration efforts were due to organizational problems, destructive politics and lack of skill or willingness of school personnel

(Bogdan, 1983). A survey of St. Paul Public Schools, Minnesota (1984), found that regular education teachers were more concerned with the effects of integration on nondisabled students and considered the teacher's attitude less important to the special education student's success, while special education teachers generally viewed the teacher's attitude as critical to the special education student's success. It appears that cooperation and knowledge sharing among school staff are essential to the success of integration.

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