SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN NORMALIZED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS: THE ROLE OF COUNSELING AND CONSULTATION

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Abstract: Definition of inclusion of special needs students in regular educational placements. Identification of the role of counseling and consultation to facilitate the successful integration process. Discussion of six critical issues in determining successful integration, with suggestions of counseling/consultation input: (1) the belief system, (2) the need for preparation and support, (3) resistances to inclusion, (4) understanding the organizational culture, (5) institutional entropy, and (6) political issues.

Keywords: inclusion, counseling, consultation, integration

Inclusion is a noble goal. It is the right thing to do because it benefits the special needs student and ultimately all those who are involved in the educational and integrative process. The parents and family, teachers, educational personnel of the school, classroom peers, the student’s siblings, and the community all gain from a successful integration of the student with special needs into the mainstream of life.

The goals of this paper are to identify important dimensions of this integration, point out some of the critical dangers of unthinking and unplanned integration, and develop important supporting aspects of the integration which must be paid close attention to if it is to be successful and ultimately of benefit to the student and the multiple constituencies involved.

Inclusion, or “mainstreaming” as it is called in the United States, has often been used as a “shadow” issue to cover or compensate for other important political and situational considerations. Unfortunately, much less noble (and humanistically oriented) objectives have been achieved in the name of inclusion, with students, teachers, and the school community ultimately suffering. Rationales for the importance and benefit of inclusion have been perverted to meet other less salutary objectives. Budgetary savings, personnel management, philosophical and cultural commitments to the special needs of mem-

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