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## **Implementation of Inclusive Education in Brunei Darussalam: Review of Possible Implications for School Counselors**

By

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### **Abstract**

The paper looked at the provision of counseling services to students in government schools after the implementation of inclusive education in Brunei Darussalam. The creation of the Special Education Unit and the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance (both in the Ministry of Education) to coordinate the respective services was a welcome decision in the right direction. Inclusion, however, may have expanded the role of school counselors in many ways and possibly brought other unforeseen problems. Thirteen identified and selected factors that may impact negatively on the work of school counselors under inclusion are discussed. In addition it was observed that the Special Education Unit and the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance were not working closely as expected. There was also no information regarding the extent to which school counselors were working cooperatively with special education teachers (known as learning assistance teachers, LATs) and regular teachers in schools. This lack of liaison among these key providers of educational and counseling interventions in schools is a source of concern because solving problems of young students (both disabled and none-disabled) often requires dyadic or triadic and sometimes multi-team consultations and interventions. The none-

availability of school counselors in the preschools and special schools was also a worrying service gap. Further, the inadequate number and low level of school counselors at the primary school level (one counselor for every three schools) was considered insufficient for services to be effective. If not addressed satisfactorily, these and other related problems may become barriers to the provision of realistic, meaningful and beneficial counseling services to students under inclusive education. This is where more efforts and resources need to be channeled. A more in-depth evaluative study of the school counseling services in Brunei employing both quantitative and qualitative procedures is recommended to gain additional insights into the problem and its possible solutions.

### **Introduction, background and setting**

The Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam is situated about 443 km north of the equator on the northern coast of the island of Borneo in South-East Asia. Brunei's 5,765 square km land area with a population of just under 300,000 is sandwiched between the Malaysian Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, the Indonesian province of Kalimantan and the North China Sea. Approximately two-thirds of the population is predominantly Malay while the rest are minorities of Chinese, Iban, Dusun, Kedayan, Murud, part-Europeans and other mixtures. As a Malay Muslim monarchy, Brunei is ruled according to Islamic values and traditions by the present King His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzadin Waddaulah (Ministry of Industry and Primary Resources, 2004). Bahasa Melayu is the official language of the country. English, Chinese and Arabic are the other widely used and understood languages. Most people are bilingual although a few are trilingual or multilingual. With a rich oil-based economy and one of the highest capita GNP in the region, Brunei is fast developing economically and socially towards the levels of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea. The main agent of change is, of course education, which is fairly well funded. The country has both government and private institutions of learning. According to the Ministry of Education (2004a) implementation of the national education

system prioritizes the use of the Malay language as the official national language and the use of English and Arabic as the other mediums of instruction.

The government has adopted a 7-3-2-2 structure of education for its formal school system – a pattern representing 7 years of primary education including one year in preschool, 3 years lower secondary, 2 years upper secondary or GCE 'O' Level and 2 years GCE 'A' Level / matriculation or pre-University (Ministry of Education, 2004b). There are also Arabic schools that provide Islamic religious education and special education establishments and facilities for the disabled despite current emphasis on inclusive education.

Bahasa Melayu and English are used as mediums of instruction in government primary and secondary schools respectively. The two languages are taught as school subjects at both levels of education. Primary year 4 (Grade 4) is the transitional period when a switch is made from Bahasa Melayu to English medium of instruction in terms of the official language policy for government schools. Additional details regarding the education system may be obtained from various government documents (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2004c, d, e).

### **Psychology and psychologists in Brunei Darussalam**

The development of psychology in Brunei has, within the whole Asia context, not yet reached the level of Japan (see Sato, 2005) which has a psychological association nor the levels of India (Jain, 2005) and Pakistan (Suhail, 2004) whose universities offer a number of masters and doctoral degrees in psychology. In the Asia-Pacific context, however, the recognition of the contributions of psychology to mental health well being in Brunei is far ahead of some countries in the region such as Vanuatu (see Forster, 2005) and other developing nations (Allwood, 2005). Although a small country in terms of both land mass and population Brunei has made many achievements in psychology, only a few years after independence from Britain in 1984.

The country has special schools and an inclusive education policy (Ministry of Education, 1997). In addition the Ministry of Education also has a Special Education Unit (Wong, 2005) and a Division of Counseling and Career Guidance (Yahya, 2005). The government has, through the Ministry of Education and the University of Brunei Darussalam sponsored two international conferences on special education in 1997 and 2005 and one international conference on counseling in 1998.

Recently the government launched a Counseling Unit on 14 April 2005 within the Institute for Public Administration for civil servants and also launched the Brunei Darussalam Journal of Special Education on 6 June 2005 for researchers to publish the outcome of their investigations on various aspects of education including educational counseling. All these developments suggest that the number of Bruneians with a psychology background is increasing. The developments further imply that the growth in the economy and industrial sector may lead to the use of psychology in commercial and industrial settings. Eventually, the country might have private practitioners in psychology, a psychological society and a journal of psychology in the near future.

### **Special education unit, disabled students and inclusive education**

Between 1975 and 1994 a number of international events took place that influenced Brunei Darussalam in the direction of wanting to implement inclusive education (see for example Wong, 2005). The events included: the Declaration of Rights of Disabled Persons; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the World Conference on Education for All; the Year of Special Needs in the Classroom; the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain; and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UN, 1975; UN, 1989; UNESCO, 1994; Norjum, 2002; Koay & Sim, 2004). Following these events the government of Brunei created the Special Education Unit (SEU) in the Ministry of Education in 1994. Thereafter students with partial/mild-to-moderate disabilities (CWDs) started being included in the ordinary schools (Special Education Unit, 1994, 1997; Koay, 1994).

Students with severe-to-profound disabilities (with high support needs) remained in the special schools and centers run by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Inclusive education was fostered further by the mounting of the First Special Education International Conference held in Brunei in 1996. The country then passed and adopted a National Education Policy the following year (Ministry of Education, 1997) which required that all children (including the disabled) be provided with 12 years of basic education (preschool, primary and secondary). This policy is Brunei's equivalent of education for all (EFA) but does not mandate compulsory provision of education (Special Education Unit, 1997). The policy emphasizes the development of human resources to meet the skill needs of the country in a diversified economy.

Although the policy mentions only special needs and not school counseling services, implementation of inclusive education has implications on school counseling as a support service. The government responded appropriately by creating both the Special Education Unit and the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance in the Ministry of Education. The highlights of this National Education Policy may be summarized as follows:

- Implementation of a national education system that prioritizes the use of the Malay language as the official national language and the use of other major languages in addition to Malay such as English and Arabic as mediums of instruction;
- Provision of 12 years of education for every student that is, 7 years of primary education including a year of preschool, 3 years of lower secondary, 2 years of upper secondary or vocational / technical education;
- Provision of an integrated curriculum as well as suitable and uniform public examinations administered according to the level of education, including special needs, in all schools throughout the nation;

- Provision of Islamic religious education in accordance with Ahli Sunnah Wal-Jamaah throughout the nation;
- Provision of facilities for mathematics, science and ICT to enable students to obtain knowledge and skills needed in the constantly changing world of work;
- Provision of self-development and enrichment programs through co-curricular activities in accordance with the national philosophy of Brunei Islamic Monarchy;
- Provision of opportunities in higher education for those with appropriate qualifications and experience, such opportunities to be offered based on national needs as and when they arise; and,
- Preparation of the best possible educational infrastructure in Order to fulfill the national human resource needs.

Implementation of inclusive education was outlined in separate handbooks for learning assistance teachers (LATs), regular teachers, and head teachers (Special Education Unit, 1998a, b, c). Formal legislation for the provision of inclusive education is contained in The Education Order dated 31 December 2003 which is printed in the Brunei Darussalam Government Gazette of 2003, p. 996. In view of the policy and legislation stated above the government is the main provider of education to CWDs. Inclusive schools are registered by the Ministry of Education while special schools and centers are registered either by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MoCYS) or the Ministry of Health (MoH). The number of students integrated /included in the regular schools is not known. Similarly the exact number of children registered in the special schools and centers is also not known but the Brunei Darussalam Country Report (2005) estimated the figure to be around 1,947. There are no official statistics on out-of-school children with disabilities. The University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) offers a certificate course, a BEd and an MEd in special education (SHBIE Handbook, 2007). Students on other

degree and diploma programs with a focus on education such as the BA, BSc and Diploma in primary education also take courses in special education (Koay & Sim, 2004).

According to the policy of the Ministry of Education all trainee teachers at the university have to take courses in inclusive education. One noticeable concern is that the amount of collaboration between the Special Education Unit and the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance is not known just as there is no information on or about consultations between special education teachers and school counselors.

### **Guidance and counseling courses in Brunei**

There are no training programs for professional counselors or psychologists in Brunei Darussalam. Despite this all students training to be teachers in the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Institute of Education (SHBIE) at the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) take courses in guidance and counseling. On appointment after graduation some of these teachers are assigned special responsibilities as guidance teachers. Guidance teachers are supposed to help their colleagues and students by conducting three types of counseling: personal, academic, and career. Using the current 2007 official handbook of courses and programs offered by SHBIE, the researcher analyzed the contents of the counseling course descriptions for further information. The SHBIE Handbook (2007) contains public (rather than private) information and the investigator did not need to have informed consent to use this document for purposes of this study. From these analyses it was observed that most of the courses had references in the descriptions and their reading lists relevant to educational counseling. However the information on careers needs to be made more explicit.

Trainee teachers need to know all the three types of counseling relevant for educational or learning institutions: personal, academic, and career. This may help trainee teachers to emphasize all the three types of counseling with their students in high schools, if appointed as school counselors. Unless this were done both the trainee teachers and later their students in high schools may miss out on



some important aspects of counseling. In addition to the above counseling courses SHBIE also offers a certificate program in counseling and a postgraduate diploma course in counseling. Both programs are one-year fulltime and prepare graduates for positions as counselors in the private and public sectors (including schools). All the two programs have theoretical, practical, and research components. The Institute of Medicine at the University of Brunei Darussalam also offers courses in applied psychology (clinical and counseling). Furthermore the university itself has a counseling unit for use mainly by students.

### **Work of the counseling unit and school counselors**

As noted above the National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 1997) does not explicitly discuss school counseling services and the role of school counselors but the government has recognized the value of offering such services to students under the inclusive education system by setting up the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance (2006) within the Ministry of Education. The vision and mission of the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance seek to address the personal and academic problems of students (see Yahya, 2005; Division of Counseling and Career Guidance, 2006). Like learners in other countries, students in Brunei need counseling because of the complex nature of problems placed on them by modern education and the wide range of opportunities made available to them as well as the pressures or blues resulting from all these challenges. The Ministry of Education believes that students' good emotional well-being leads to better academic performance (Division of Counseling and Career Guidance, 2006).

At present there are four full-time school counselors in Brunei secondary schools. Of these one has an MEd with a thesis on career counseling while the other three have undergraduate diplomas in educational counseling. The rest are ordinary teachers appointed by head teachers as school counselors. There are no school counselors in preschools and special schools. Their absence constitutes a major counseling service gap to these student populations. At the primary school level the number of school

counselors is insufficient (one counselor for every three schools) for services to be realistic and effective. There is a proposal to have one assistant counselor for each primary school in future. Since school counselors are fulltime teachers, counselor burnout (or fatigue / stress) may not permit them to discharge their counseling duties competently.

A primary function of the school counselor in Brunei is to assess referred students to determine their personal and academic problems. The outcome of the assessment is often used to develop an intervention strategy in form of either an individualized psychological plan (IPP) or an individualized education plan (IEP) or both depending on the nature of the presenting problem. In most cases the counseling intervention is supposed to follow the consultative triadic model involving the student, counselor and the learning assistant teacher (LAT) who is trained in special education but the extent to which schoolteachers and school counselors work together is not known and this is an undesirable feature.

The parents are also usually supposed to be consulted and encouraged to participate informally by observing and assessing the child at home. The Division of Counseling and Career Guidance supports school counselors in a variety of ways including providing them with a counselor's daily activities journal, a counselor's log book, and a counselor's plan for individual intervention. School counselors use all these documents when discharging their counseling duties. The purpose of all these is to encourage school counselors to develop and maintain strong record-keeping skills and habits. The Counseling unit also encourages school counselors to be in close liaison with other relevant professionals such as medical doctors, psychiatrists, social workers and nurses. In addition the Counseling unit organizes and mounts a number of short in-service courses to equip school counselors with further skills relevant to their work. The workshops cover diverse topics such as student academic skills training (listening, studying, reading and writing); career exhibitions / expos and career camps; anti-drug addiction prevention program; peer counseling; individual and group counseling; and motivational talks. In addition the Counseling Unit runs

an in-service course on counseling topics that school counselors are encouraged to attend. The course does not lead to a formal qualification but covers diverse and relevant theories such as psychoanalysis (Freud), neopsychoanalysis (Adler), self-theory (Rogers), rational emotive therapy (Ellis), behavioral therapy (Skinner) and the role of Islamic religion in counseling. The Counseling unit encourages school counselors to assess students' personal problems using the Mooney Problem Check Lists (Mooney & Gordon, 1950).

### **Counseling implications arising from implementation of inclusion**

Despite the measures described above and instituted by the government through the Ministry of Education (such as creating the unit for special education and the division for counseling) this study is of the opinion that there is still a wide range of educational counseling implications that will need to be addressed as inclusive education is being implemented. Resolving these problems may improve further the services that are currently being offered. Implementation of inclusive education is likely to expand and complicate the work of school counselors in various ways such as introducing students with various degrees of ability and special needs in regular schools. The thirteen implications discussed separately below concern: the curriculum; teaching methods; assessment techniques; severely disabled learners; barriers to inclusion and counseling; desirable forms of school counseling; emotional security and social acceptance; use of ethical rules; use of psychological tests; education of the gifted and talented students; costs of school counseling; training of school counselors; and the position of school counselor. This arbitrary list is not exhaustive but rather illustrative of the possible problems that might be encountered by the school counselors and whose solutions may need to be sought.

### **Reform of the school curriculum**

A suitable curriculum for disabled learners is one that equips learners with practical skills useful for leading a productive and meaningful life (Australian Education Council, 1991). Such a desirable curriculum should be flexible to address individual differences and take into consideration the dynamic

nature of life that changes with time and technology (Olivier & Williams, 2005). Flexibility of the curriculum is even more important for students with intellectual difficulties (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997). A flexible curriculum might make it possible to vary the teaching strategies, assessment techniques, and counseling sessions. In addition, the ideal curriculum should also have adequate social and ecological validity (Mash & Terdal, 1988). This requires making an ecosystemic and an ecobehavioural analysis of the child in his/her social and ecological environments (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 1999). Students with special needs require more practical than academic skills (Martinez, 1987) which they should be able to use insightfully and productively (Trafton & Claus, 1994). The curricula should also emphasize social skills as such skills are more important to disabled than non-disabled students (Fields, 1997).

In view of these ideas which are well known by all special educators, the Special Education Unit in conjunction with the Curriculum Development Department produced a curriculum guide for students with high support needs (Special Education Unit, 2005). The guide, which is in form of intervention lesson plans, focuses on the following topics: communication; gross and fine motor skills; social skills; self care; health and safety; Islamic religious education; self-direction; functional academics; leisure skills; work skills; information communication technology (ICT) skills; assessment; and individualized education plans (IEP). The curriculum guide was officially launched and explained to teachers at a conference organized by the Ministry of Education (Special Education Unit, 2007; Lim, 2007a, b; Yeo, 2007).

The guide appears to be good for use by both schoolteachers and school counselors. However school counselors may need separate workshops to show them how contents of the guide might be incorporated into counseling sessions for those students who may be referred for counseling. Because of inclusion, school counselors in Brunei might be required to work more cooperatively than before with special needs teachers, regular teachers, and school administrators in designing and implementing the

reformed curriculum. They may also be required to work closely and collaboratively with these peers and parents of disabled and gifted students during the provision of academic, personal, and career counseling services to needy students. Depending on the nature of the student's problem(s) some counseling interventions and consultations may need to be dyadic or triadic. The need for school counselors to receive in-service training in curriculum adaptation for inclusive education seems to be implied.

### **Innovative and responsive teaching methods**

Students with special educational needs can learn anything that their non-disabled peers could provided teaching is effective. There are however a few common things that instructors and counselors of learners with various disabilities are supposed to be able to do. Detailed examples of these are discussed by Educational Testing Service (1993) and Conway (1997). By virtue of their training, expertise and experience, properly qualified educational counselors will be required to assist regular teachers to acquire in-depth knowledge of teaching techniques such as remedial teaching, individualized educational plans, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, role play, task analysis, project methods, team-teaching, computer assisted instruction, mastery learning, aptitude treatment interaction model, social learning, and discovery learning. Teaching and counseling in inclusive schools cannot just follow fixed curriculum and methods (Olivier & Williams, 2005). Teachers and counselors need to use a variety of strategies during lessons and counseling sessions (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). The need for adaptive lessons is more when teaching students with mental retardation (Olivier & Williams, 2005). The application of assistive computer technology (ACT) in teaching and counseling interventions is another skill area where both school teachers and counselors might need training. Although ACT may have positive impact on disabled learners the process and realities of integrating it in the curriculum, lessons and counseling interventions is more complex (Morrison, 2007). In view of this school counselors may be required to help teachers to obtain these skills by organizing and conducting appropriate workshops,

seminars and conferences as part of in-service training for ordinary teachers. This suggests that school counselors might themselves need to receive in-service training in these skill areas before they could successfully mount meaningful workshops for other (regular) teachers.

### **Need for continuous academic assessments**

Implementation of inclusive education will require innovating strategies by which learners are evaluated. It will be necessary to adapt test instruments (both psychological and educational) to accommodate the special needs of learners with disabilities. This will need to be done without lowering the quality of the assessments. Another point which will need to be observed is that the system of education will need to put more emphasis on criterion-referenced assessments rather than norm-referenced tests. Murray (1996) discusses in detail some of the specific adaptations that will need to be made to norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests to be usable by learners with various disabilities. These adjustments to formal test instruments will need to be made not only to make them suitable for use by disabled learners but also to ensure that such learners are accorded a fair chance or opportunity of experiencing success, a major motivating factor in learning. In addition to modifying the formal evaluations, an inclusive education system also needs to use a number of informal assessments. A few examples of useful informal assessment are: continuous assessment; experimental assessments; observational assessments; learning assessments; parental assessments; peer assessments; self-assessments; portfolio assessments; and project assessments.

Unlike the formal evaluations, the informal assessments are not well known by most regular school teachers in Brunei. The nine informal assessments listed above are extensively discussed by Engelbrecht et al (1999). School counselors in Brunei might need to organize workshops to help train regular teachers on the use of adapted tests as well as informal assessments and explain why it is important to do all these things. Further to all the above adaptations, a special emphasis may need to be placed on continuous assessment.

There is abundant literature on the value and significance of continuous assessment for students with special needs (Somerset, 1987; Lloyd-Jones et al., 1986; Schofield, 1972; Taylor, 2003). Again school counselors in Brunei may need to refresh and update themselves on these assessment strategies before they could help other teachers. The biggest problem on student evaluations for school counselors in Brunei will come from the use of psychological assessments rather than educational tests. Brunei school counselors are aware of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* in USA that has placed a new level of responsibility and accountability on school teachers and counselors to ensure that all children perform well on standardized educational and psychological tests. However critics of this law argue that it may not be possible to achieve its objectives in the case of some students with physical and intellectual impairments (Hirsh-Pasek, Kochanoff, Newcombe, and de Villiers, 2005). Crisp (2007) noted, for example, that a verbal test may not be appropriate for the student with a physical disability, visual impairment, and/or the inability to speak. Sattler (2002) shares this testing concern for students with visual disabilities. In addition Fagan (2000) compiled a list of disabled students who may not reasonably take standardized IQ tests. Only limited testing accommodations can thus be made on standardized IQ tests because designers of such tests make strict instructions in the technical manuals about how each test must be administered, scored, and analyzed (Braden & Elliot, 2003; Epstein, Schweinhart, DeBruin-Parecki, & Robin, 2004). This suggests that school counselors in Brunei may need to search for alternatives to standardized IQ tests in their counseling work (Elliot, 1990; Hammill, Pearson, & Wiederhold, 1997; DeThorne & Schaefer, 2004). Standardised IQ tests might also not be appropriate for use in Brunei as they may be culturally biased. In addition some researchers (Klassen, Neufeld, & Munro, 2005) caution that an intelligence measure alone may not be sufficient to indicate a learning disability and that other abilities to function adaptively in the environment should also be considered.

### **Teachers' attitudes to severely disabled learners**

In general, regular school teachers are opposed to having disabled students in their classrooms (Jamieson, 1984; Jones et al, 1978; Knoff, 1985). The more severe or profound the student's disability the more likely such a child may be rejected by regular school teachers, non-disabled peers in an inclusive setting, and parents of non-disabled children (Heward, 1996). One possible reason for this stance or resistance seems to be due to regular teachers' lack of appropriate skills to properly help severely disabled students in mainstream schools. In addition ordinary teachers need to work harder with such students. Among the partially or mildly disabled students who are includable in ordinary schools, regular teachers may prefer more those who have learning disorders and might prefer least those with mental and behavioural disorders (William & Algozzine, 1979; Vandivier & Vandivier, 1981). A major concern which is often raised when a severely or profoundly disabled child is included in a mainstream classroom is the fear that his/her presence and participation might detract and retard the academic achievement of his/her classmates (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). In addition regular teachers often think that the placement of disabled children in ordinary classrooms might negatively influence teaching effectiveness (Myles & Simpson, 1989).

Hunt and Goetz (1997) reviewed 19 research investigations of inclusive educational programs, practices and outcomes for students with severe disabilities. Their meta analysis revealed that students with severe disabilities were actually also includable in ordinary schools and that they may achieve positive academic and learning outcomes contrary to the unfounded fears or concerns held by many stakeholders. In this case, school counselors in Brunei may need to mount a lot of sensitization or awareness campaigns for school administrators, regular teachers, non-disabled students and parents of non-disabled students to change their negative attitudes in the opposite direction. This is important because the success of both inclusive education school counseling will depend on all these parties concerned. The importance of school teachers and counselors in Brunei to have the relevant skills for intervening with severely disabled students was recently the subject of the "Curriculum Guide for



Students with High Support Needs” conference organized by the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education from 3 to 4 September 2007. At this conference Lim (2007a, b) and Yeo (2007) presented papers that were deemed useful to both teachers and counselors in inclusive educational settings. The Special Education Unit (2007) emphasized the use of ICT as a basic intervention tool that could be employed by schoolteachers and counselors.

### **Practical barriers to inclusion in Brunei**

The reasons for advocating inclusion the world over are many. Inclusion is feasible and viable in any country provided barriers to its effective implementation are addressed sufficiently. Unfortunately there are often many barriers (other than attitudes) to inclusion.

Shaddock (1999) warns that just because one approach (segregated special education) didn't work; don't assume that its opposite will. The inclusive approach may also be unsuccessful for a number of other factors (see Wheldall, 1999). For example, several disability commissions, court cases, and efficacy studies have found evidence both for and against inclusive education being in the best interest of the included student and/or the students and teacher of the regular class (Power & Bartlett, 1999). It therefore seems that school counselors in Brunei might need to do a lot of advocacy work to press for the success of inclusive education. Three of the practical issues Brunei school counselors may need to advocate for are listed and briefly discussed below.

- Teacher/pupil ratio. The current high teacher-pupil ratios in Brunei which are believed to range from 1:30 to 1:40 should be brought down to between 1:20 to 1:30 so that teachers in inclusive schools may give reasonable individual attention to learners with special needs. Research on Brunei education system shows that paying individual attention to students in large classes is very difficult (Yoong, Lourdusamy, Nannestad, & Veloo, 2001; Yusop, Douglas, & Mak, 2001; Vaiyatvutjamai & Clements, 2004). School counselors could provide research-based advice to school administrators on this problem which complicates both teaching and counseling.

- Number of disabled children included in each classroom. Only a manageable number of disabled children should be included in each class (e.g. 2 or 3) to enable the teacher to give them maximum individual attention. School counselors will need to advise teachers and school administrators on matters regarding making reasonable placements on an individual basis to facilitate diagnostic teaching and intervention sessions.
- Expectations. Teachers, non-disabled students, parents of non-disabled students and society in general should not only have positive attitudes towards disabled students but also have positive expectations from them. This will require school counselors to mount more sensitization / awareness campaigns in the country to reduce perfectionist attitudes and tendencies among the above stakeholders under inclusive education.

### **Desirable forms of school counseling**

Students with special needs will need counseling in many areas of academic functioning than their non-disabled peers. Those with severe to profound disabilities will also need disability and rehabilitation counseling to help with their transition from school to a vocation suitable for their disability. This will be a big challenge to school counselors in Brunei because there are many traditional categories of disability representing the whole disability continuum or scale (partial/mild, moderate, severe, and profound). In addition disabled students will be found at all levels of the education system (preschool, primary, secondary, college and university).

The special education teachers and school counselors in Brunei are trained mainly to address problems for three disabilities (learning, emotional / behavioural, and intellectual difficulties). Counseling disabled children in preschools might also pose a big problem because of the kids' limitations in life experiences, language, and writing. In some instances school counselors may need to work in a

team setting with other professionals such as special teachers, speech therapists, psychiatrists and medical doctors. Furthermore there might be potential problems associated with counseling the young at-risk children in rare or unusual circumstances. These (though few in the Brunei context) may include children of divorce, children in stepfamilies, adopted children, children of drug addicts, children with eating disorders, children with autism or ADHD, and children with severe chronic illnesses or poor health. Most of the school counselors in Brunei may not know how to counsel these children and will have to make referrals to other professionals. It seems that in-service training for school counselors in these areas might be helpful. Career or vocational counseling may be another difficult area that school counselors might encounter because it may be difficult for students with severe to profound disabilities to obtain gainful employment in Brunei due to various reasons including keen competition for the few available jobs.

The Brunei Darussalam Country Report (2005) suggested that the government should look into the possibility of establishing a sheltered workshop facility to provide supervised work so that the more able of these young adults with special needs could be gainfully employed. The report further recommended that inducements should be built into the private work sector so that opportunities for employment are made available for young adults with special needs who have completed secondary school. School counselors may be required to follow up on these recommendations and lobby for employment of the disabled school leavers.

### **Emotional security and social acceptance of disabled learners**

Part of the school counselor's job under inclusive education in Brunei will be to help the school to design and maintain an appropriate social environment. Both the school and classroom climate or atmosphere should be acceptive, supportive and conducive to learning. Learners (both disabled and non-disabled) and teachers must acquire good social skills (e.g. good listening, observation, and nonverbal language) to enhance social interaction. Disabled children need a lot of encouragement.

Without such an environment a disabled learner cannot benefit much from integration or inclusion. The extent to which school counselors may help in this regard is not known. School counselors might benefit from attending in-service workshops on communication and social skills and through the multiplier effect transfer these same skills to schoolteachers later.

### **Implications regarding the use of ethical rules**

Practically all students in Brunei preschools, primary, and secondary schools are below 20 years of age and are therefore minors by law. For example they cannot make major choices and decisions about themselves without the help and approval of their significant others such as parents, teachers and school administrators. Similarly they cannot be in counseling or psychotherapy without agreement of their significant others. Before getting any student into counseling the school counselor will first have to discuss with his/her significant others the ethical issues and conditions of involvement relating to anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, voluntary participation, protection from harm (physical/psychological) and informed consent. Transparency will be the hallmark of therapy. The school counselor will be required to clearly communicate and make known to parties concerned (and/or interested) all the intervention procedures that will be used in counseling sessions (e.g. curriculum contents to be taught, teaching methods to be used, educational assessment techniques to be employed, psychological tests to be administered, types of observations and interviews to be conducted, and how effectiveness of therapy will be evaluated before terminating the helping relationship). Depending on the degree and extent of the student's disability, therapy may require the participation of the significant others. This is a difficult task that will require obtaining and maintaining adequate levels of cooperation from many diverse stakeholders including other professionals. The success of such a partnership/collaboration will partly depend on the skills and experience of the counselor. This is a sensitive area for which school counselors in Brunei may need extra training or updating.

### **Assessment of mental health problems using psychological tests**

For many reasons psychological testing might be one of the biggest challenges facing school counselors in Brunei. First, most major and useful psychological tests are restricted to protect their validity, proper use, and commercial value. Only highly qualified and experienced psychologists, therapists and counselors may have access to them. Second, most of these tests are too long and are written in Standard English that may be difficult to comprehend by young students who speak English as a second or third language. The tests (including versions for children) have not been translated into major Brunei languages (Malay and Chinese). Third, although young students in preschool and primary schools may be less inhibited in making verbal responses during interactions than adults, they actually have less vocabulary and less experience in using a language. Language and thought are supposed to be related but for most young students they cannot think like an adult although they may be able to use adult language.

School counselors in Brunei might therefore want to consider using several modes of communication when dealing with young students (e.g. nonverbal, pictorial, drawing, sand play, etc). Fourth, the cost of the major psychological tests is too high and therefore prohibitive in acquiring them. Fifth, school counselors will need to be fully aware of both the advantages and limitations of psychological tests for use in counseling. Corey (1991) and Yalom (2002) offer interesting discussions of these. In addition Sattler (2001), Kaufman and Lichtenberger (1999), and Robinson (1989) provide detailed discussions of the use of psychological tests at school level. Psychometrics is a technical field in which school counselors in Brunei may need to have continuous professional development workshops to equip them with the necessary skills and the latest in this field.

### **Psychoeducational interventions for talented / gifted students**

A program for the education of the gifted/talented students is now being worked out for Brunei Darussalam and due to be implemented soon (Special Education Unit, 2006). One way in which school

counselors may contribute in this program is to conduct workshops to train regular teachers in strategies that they can use to identify gifted/talented students through observations (teacher nominations) and in administering of non-restricted psychoeducational instruments to determine students who are adaptive, creative and intelligent. The school counselors may be required to score and profile the individual protocols as well as prepare reports on each case. To do all these technical tasks competently school counselors in Brunei might need to undergo further training.

### **Cost of resources required for school counseling**

Like elsewhere counseling in Brunei schools under inclusive education will cost money (in terms of time, effort, tests, personnel, and other resources) and it must be properly or adequately funded for the services to have good quality and to be successful. For example the sensitization/awareness workshops and seminars mounted by the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance cost money to implement. School counselors as the direct providers of counseling services to students may need to be creative, innovative and resourceful in advocating for funds. Both the Counseling Unit and school counselors need a good budget to provide reasonable counseling services. Lack of adequate funds may become a barrier not only to the implementation of inclusion but also to provision of realistic counseling services as it happened in other countries (see Kiarie, 2004). The onus is on the government, non-governmental organizations and the public to ensure that adequate funds and other necessary resources are made available for the implementation of inclusive education and the provision of meaningful counseling services. Financial concerns might be beyond the responsibilities of the school counselors.

### **Formal and informal training of school counselors**

Wolfendale ((1992; 1993) and Bos and Vaughn (1994) emphasize the importance of equipping teachers with relevant skills to enable them to effectively handle learners with special needs in inclusive schools. A similar emphasis is attached on special needs skills by the policy of the Ministry of Education

that requires all trainee teachers at the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) to take core courses in inclusive education. The student teachers majoring in special needs education take additional courses in special education to equip them with skills to manage learners with disabilities. Similarly there are also core courses in guidance and counseling that trainee teachers are required to take. However there are no degree programs yet in school counseling at UBD. At present student teachers take, in general, more courses in special education than in guidance and counseling. They have school-based practicums in special education but not in guidance and counseling. The exception are a few students on the certificate and postgraduate diploma programs in counseling who take more courses and do practicals in counseling (SHBIE Handbook, 2007). Despite this difference some regular trainee teachers are, as noted above, appointed as school counselors after completing their university studies. This imbalance in the two skill areas needs to be addressed to enable school counselors (without a certificate or diploma in counseling) to function more effectively. Serving teachers without requisite counseling skills may acquire them through seminars and workshops. Training of school counselors is as important as the training of teachers in special needs skills. At secondary school level classes in most schools are streamlined by ability. The inclusion of disabled learners will introduce students at different levels of ability within each class. Some students such as those with mental retardation may be multi-handicapped and this might complicate further the teaching, assessment, and counseling situations in the schools thereby requiring more skills on the teachers and counselors. The pre-service teacher education program at UBD needs to be adjusted to provide more counseling skills to initial teachers. In addition an in-service degree program in counseling needs to be mounted for serving teachers interested to be school counselors.

### **Position of the school counselor**

At present school counselors in Brunei are ordinary schoolteachers who are assigned an additional responsibility of counseling students with personal problems. Students with academic

problems usually are referred to a special education teacher (LAT) within the school. However many students with personal problems also experience academic problems and some students with academic problems also have personal problems. It appears that school counselors will have more to do with students under inclusive education. The Ministry of Education might wish to consider the possibility of creating and designating an integrated and substantive post of school counselor with responsibilities for all forms of school counseling (academic, personal, and career) at each school.

At present there are only four such fulltime school counselors but this number may need to be increased as counseling cases might increase and perhaps get more complex under inclusive education. The appointed counselors should have minimum teaching loads to allow them to pay more attention on counseling interventions. The school counselor could be equated to a head of department in rank (with a remunerative allowance as an incentive) and his/her office could be given the status of a department. This would require the appointed school counselor to have adequate knowledge and skills in all the four essential areas of school psychology (teacher education, educational psychology, special education, and educational counseling) to perform the expanded and complex role competently.

## **Conclusion**

The paper discussed thirteen selected factors that may impact negatively on the work of school counselors in Brunei Darussalam under implementation of inclusive education. The absence of both special education teachers and school counselors at the preschool level was noted as a major concern as was the non-availability of school counselors in special schools and centers and the insufficient number of school counselors at the primary education level. In practice the Special Education Unit and the Division of Counseling and Career Guidance in the Ministry of Education are expected to work in liaison but the degree to which this is happening is unknown. Similarly school counselors and special education teachers (called Learning Assistant Teachers, LATs) in the secondary education system are supposed to be working in close cooperation but the extent to which they do this is also not clear. Mere



identification of these problems is therefore not enough. A more important undertaking to be made is to try to minimize their possible adverse effects on the quality of the work of school counselors. This is where more efforts and resources need to be directed. These constraints might become barriers to the provision of realistic, beneficial and meaningful inclusive education and counseling services in schools, if not addressed. It must always be remembered that barriers are often temporal and that with determination, effort, resources and time, their effects may be reduced and eventually eliminated. Further comprehensive research is recommended to understand the problem and its likely solutions better.

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