

Inclusive Education / Inclusion Strategies

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ABSTRACT

As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child. Emphasising inclusive education does not rule out special schools or centers. They would still be required to cater to children with profound and complex difficulties in need of more specialized and extensive help, including e.g. many deaf children. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. This alternative should, however, not be considered, unless classroom placement cannot meet their needs. In line with the new policy of inclusive education, special schools begin to function more and more as resource centers. They involve in outreach programmes, where they

draw on their vast experience and knowledge. They link their activities with those of the regular schools, the families, and the communities. Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. In this context, it is important to stress the role parents have. They have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.

Key Words: *Inclusive Education, Government Programmes*

Introduction

Inclusion in education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-special needs students. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. Implementation of

these practices varies. Schools most frequently use the inclusion model for selected students with mild to moderate special needs. Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, do not separate "general education" and "special education" programs; instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together. Inclusive education differs from the 'integration' or 'mainstreaming' model of education, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and special educational needs, and learners changing or becoming 'ready for' or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Feeling included is not limited to physical and cognitive disabilities, but also includes the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and of other forms of human differences. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett wrote, "student performance and behaviour in educational tasks can be profoundly affected by the way we feel, we are seen and judged by others. When we expect to be viewed as inferior, our abilities seem to diminish".

There are an estimated 25 million children out of school in India (MHRD 2003 statistics, cited

in World Bank, 2004), many of whom are marginalized by factors such as poverty, gender, disability, caste, religion etc. Therefore undoubtedly the idea of inclusive education is certainly highly relevant to our current condition, where differences in religion, faith, gender, ethnicity and ability are often seen as a threat rather than a source of richness and diversity. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. The major support for inclusive education came from the 1994 World conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain which emphasized that: Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The urgency to address the needs of learners who are vulnerable to exclusion through responsive educational opportunities was also highlighted at the Dakar (Senegal) World Education forum in April 2000 where in it was emphasized –“The key challenge is to ensure that the broad vision of education for all as an inclusive concept reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All... must take account of the needs of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and

poor health; and those with special learning needs....". When considering understandings of, approaches to, and impacts of inclusive education, the inevitable diversity and complexity in a context of this size must be taken into account. India's 1.3 billion people speak 18 different languages (GOI, 2002), and 844 dialects (Singal, 2005a), worship varied religions, have unique customs, differ in their exposure to disease and access to types of nutrition which affect their health and socio economic status, and also communication which influence their access to government resources such as education or healthcare. As a rule, there are a number of practical problems that have to be solved before a child with special educational needs can go to school or take part in school activities. The arrangements it takes are fairly simple, provided co-ordinated local and unconventional initiatives are stimulated. One should also remember that the child's schoolmates represent a valuable potential partner who is ready and able to help in overcoming some of these problems. Until recently, most conceptual literature on inclusive education was Northern (European and North American) in origin, taking a 'whole-school' approach to institutional change (Peters, 2004), and influenced by the social model of disability. Children in special schools were seen as geographically and socially segregated from their peers, and the initial movement to

locationally integrate these students in mainstream schools ('integration') shifted to one where the whole school was encouraged to become more adaptable and inclusive in its day-to-day educational practices for all students ('inclusive education'). Pedagogy in particular was highlighted as the key to meeting all students' educational needs by making the curriculum flexible, and so more accessible. By recognising that teaching methods which can make curriculum accessible to children with disabilities can also make learning accessible to all students (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow, 1991), a teacher or school principal is well on the way to improving the overall quality of their school. In this way, inclusive education is not a disability-only issue, but an educational quality issue (ibid).

There is a growing, although not comprehensive, literature in the south, which focuses more on external factors with its 'community approach' (Peters, 2004). In developing contexts with large numbers of out-of-school children, inclusive education tends to be more broadly concerned with school access and education deprivations for marginalised groups such as girls, ethnic minorities, poor families and disabled children in CREATE zones one and two, who have never attended or dropped out of school (Subrahmanian, 2003). It seems that there is currently an expanding

discourse on inclusive education developing amongst some academics and teaching professionals in India, many of whom, like Mike Oliver (1996), see inclusive education as exclusively concerned with children with

Inclusive Education in India: Interpretation, Implementation and disabilities (Singal, 2005a) needed which facilitating learning of every child.

Traditional Approach	Inclusive Approach
Education for some	Education for all
Static	Flexible
Collective teaching	Individualised Teaching
Learning in segregated areas	Learning in Integrated areas
Emphasis on teaching subject-orientated	Emphasis on learning child-centred
Opportunities limited by exclusion	Equalisation of opportunities for all
Labels children disability wise	Planning is made on ability levels and opposes all kinds of labeling

Inclusion a holistic vision

Any child may experience a special need during the course of educational years (UNESCO). Some children feel 'left-outs' and never enter school or enter only for a few years and, as repeaters, become 'drop-outs' or, more correctly 'pushed-outs', without their needs having been met. These children are a vivid illustration of the failure of schools to teach rather than the pupils' failure to learn. A school system emphasising Education for All should ensure the right of all children to a meaningful education based on individual needs and abilities. (Ture Johnson 2002)

The regular schools will now increasingly play a major role in making provision for children with special educational needs available nation-wide. Making the school system flexible and adopting an inclusive approach may, however, prove the most challenging task of all, a task calling for deep reflection and discussion of the two fundamental questions: "What is the overall role of education", and "What is it we want children to learn in school?" It might lead to the need of reforming the school system as a whole from a traditional, examination-oriented to an inclusive, child-oriented approach.

Policy and Reality

To open up the regular school system to disabled children is not an easy task. The policy on inclusion and mainstreaming can easily become "main dumping" if not implemented carefully. It was, however, pointed out that a big gap exists between this ideal situation and the present reality. There is an urgent need for interventions for equipping general teachers with special skills, making general curricula, teaching methods. Evaluation procedures, learning material disability-sensitive and addressing the attitudes /needs of other children in the school to ensure such interventions benefits all children. It is important to have a holistic, comprehensive and inter-sect oral approach where all pieces are put together. It is not enough to present and implement one part only. An inclusion policy cannot stand-alone and "cannot be a substitute for careful planning of interventions and systematic capacity-building for the implementers of these interventions".

The curriculum for "ALL" needs to be:

1. Child centered: Children with disabilities need child-centred curriculum, which takes into account the individual needs of children. The curriculum needs to set specific, observable, measurable and achievable learning outcomes (SOMA).
2. Flexible: A flexible, locally relevant curriculum, teaching and learning

strategies are intrinsically important for children with special needs to participate in the educational process.

3. Participatory: Children with special needs require a learning environment in which they can actively participate in learning in small groups learning settings
4. Partnership with parents: Partnership with parents is a key factor as children learn not only in the classrooms but also at home.

Teacher Education Programmes

There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer "Education of children with special needs" as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However it gives them a holistic perspective with respect to dealing with diversity or challenge negative attitudes. This reinforces the 'difference' of children with disabilities who, some believe, can only be taught by teachers qualified specifically for them (Signal, 2005a). Although, it is ultimately teacher treatment of students in the classroom, rather than the training per se, that would reinforce this difference. Interestingly, distrust in both the special and mainstream

education systems leads some parents to keep children with disabilities at home for fear of their abuse or neglect in the classroom (Julka, 2005); which may then be interpreted by teachers as a lack of community interest in education for their children, as demonstrated in the PROBE Report (PROBE,1999). There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students (Mukhopadhyay, nd). Many government programmes have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a 'special needs' focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom. The poor quality educational provision in many schools is reflected in the fact that many govt. job reservations for adults with disabilities remain unfilled. It is more likely to be directly related to the fact that very few children with disabilities get to, or stay in, school that there is a lack qualified, let alone confident candidates.

Conclusion

Inclusive education must respond to all pupils as individuals, recognizing individuality as something to be appreciated and respected. Inclusive education responding to special needs will thus have positive returns for all pupils." All children and young people of the world,

with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to a certain type of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all its children."

That is a big and difficult task, but "where there is a will there is a way!"

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