



Improving Student Outcomes through Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

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Inclusion is really about practical changes that we can make so that children with diverse needs can succeed in our classroom and school. In order to meet the diverse learning needs of the pupil's teacher should teach knowledge, skills, understanding, in a ways that suit their pupil's abilities. Maximizing of learning for all children by taking into account the diverse needs should be the mission of every school and teacher should be equipped to help the learner to provide opportunity to learn effectively which is right of all children. Inclusion is all kinds of practices of good teaching. What good teachers do is to think and develop ways to reach out to all children.

Education is one of the inputs to ensure the quality of life of an individual. Every child has the right to education irrespective of age, gender, background, socio-economic status, race, caste, creed, religion and ability. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 in the section on "Education for Equality" has emphasized the need for removal of disparities and to equalize educational opportunity by attending the specific needs of those who had been denied so far. For achieving equalization of educational opportunity children of remote or nomadic population, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities, girl child, street and working children, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS should have access to quality education comparable to other children. Our classrooms are diverse in terms of the types of children we teach and the ways the learners learn. Diverse classrooms have benefits for all learners and teachers. Children have different experiences, skills, knowledge, values and abilities. All children contribute and bring some ingredients to the teaching learning process of the classroom. We live in a society of increasing diversity where success will come to those who learn to work and live cooperatively with others. Every school has to accept inclusion as a basic value.

Introduction

Inclusive education means including not only children with disabilities in the class room but all children with diverse background and abilities. Actually getting these children into our classroom is only half of the challenge. The other half is in meeting all of their different learning needs as well as in giving special attention to those children who are usually excluded from the classroom or from participating/learning in the classroom. Children learn in a different ways because of hereditary factors, experience environment or their personalities. Consequently, we need to use a variety of teaching methods and activities to meet the different leaning needs of our children. The basic concept that giving equal opportunity and access to all children does not mean treating everyone the same, this will not act to address the diverse needs. Equality of educational opportunity requires an understanding of the conditions for success where children with diverse needs will be given more support or additional provision in order to have an equal chance access to success and achievement in general classroom. In order to ensure that this happens, we need to foster inclusive classrooms in inclusive schools.

Concept of Inclusive Education

The philosophy of inclusion is a paradigm shift and a move from segregation through mainstreaming and integration to inclusion. Thus the journey of inclusion indicates a process rather than an event; the process reflecting occurrence of significant changes brought about by new ways of thinking, new ways of operating in the classroom, and adapting to the constantly changing thinking attitude and social conditions. Integration was used to denote the physical placement of students with disabilities into mainstream schools, without any change in the schools where the students were admitted, 'Inclusion' on the other hand is a much broader concept. Inclusion as a social and educational philosophy believes that all people are valuable members of mainstream society, whatever their differences and diversities may be in education. This implies that all children irrespective of their abilities and disabilities socioeconomic background religion or ethnic, language or cultural background, religion and gender go together to the same school. It is the philosophy that aims to improve the quality of education for all children in a classroom. It reflects on human rights and social justice. It is a way to reach out all the children. It does not look at whether children are able to follow the regular educational system but looks at teachers and schools in terms of how they can adapt educational programmes to individual needs. Any discussion about the definition of inclusive education needs to use the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action (UNESCO, 1994) as a reference point. The Statement re-affirms the right to education

of every individual, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renews the pledge made by the world community at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All to ensure the right to education for all, regardless of individual differences.

The Statement also mentions the 1993 UN Standard

Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities which states that the education of disabled children should be an integral part of the education system.

There is however, no reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- Education system should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system. The definition of inclusion is clearly broader than just disability, as the Framework spells out the many different categories of children who may be excluded from the education.
- The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that: Schools should accommodate **all children** regardless of their physical, intellectual, social and emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or religious minorities, and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups.

Education of Children with Special Needs (NCF 2005)

The national curriculum framework for school education (NCFSE) (2000), brought out by the NCERT, recommended inclusive school for all without specific reference to pupil with Special Educational Needs (SEN) as way of providing quality education to all learners. Though in India there is no formal or official definition of inclusion, but the draft scheme on Inclusive Education uses the following definition: Inclusive Education means all learners, young people-with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, schools, and community educational settings with appropriate network of support

services (Draft of Inclusive Education Scheme, MHRD, 2003) National Curriculum Framework (2005) A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout our education system. The participation of all children needs to be ensured in all spheres of their life in and outside the school. Schools need to become center that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently abled children from marginalized sections, and children in difficult circumstances get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education (NCF 2005, P85) **NCF - 2005**

Recommendations of **National Focus Group on Education of Children with Special Needs (NCF-2005)** are as follows:

- Make all early education and care programmes (from 0-6 years) sensitive and responsive to the special needs of children, including training of Anganwadi workers in identification of needs of the children with disabilities, use of age appropriate play and learning materials and the counseling of parents.
 - ✓ Make all schools inclusive by:
 - ✓ Enforcing without exception the neighborhood school policy.
 - ✓ Removing physical barriers
 - ✓ Reviewing barriers created by admission procedures (screening, identification, parental interaction, selection and evaluation), this should include private schools.
 - ✓ Building the capacity of teachers to function in an inclusive setting.
 - ✓ Making the curriculum flexible and appropriate to accommodate the diversity of school children including those with disability in both cognitive and noncognitive areas.
 - ✓ Making support services available in the form of technology (including ICT), teaching-learning materials and specialists.
 - ✓ Involving parents, family, and the community at all stages of education.
- Correlate the style of teaching to the learning styles of all children.
- Regard all special teachers in a given school as full-fledged members of the school community.
- Make all curriculum-related policies and programmes inclusive in nature to effectively address issues related to the education of children with SEN.
- Develop strengths and abilities of all children rather than highlighting limitations.

- To nurture all aspects of the personality, viz., cognitive, affective, and connotative – games, dance, drama, music, and art and craft must be give equal importance and value.
- No child with disabilities should be asked to produce certificates either for admission, examination, getting support facilities / scholarships, etc.
- Introduce sign language, Braille, and finger Braille as a third language for all children.
- Interpret SEN more broadly and do not restrict its interpretation to the definitions given in the PWD Act.

Role of Special Teacher

Guidance and Counselling

Everybody needs guidance and counselling in dealing with a variety of problems and at various stages of life. Even though the basic of guidance and counselling are generally same in all areas, there are differences when it comes to specific situations. Guidance is a process of helping the individuals through their own efforts to discover and develop their potentialities for personal happiness and social usefulness. It helps a person in solving his or her problems and promotes the growth and development of individual in self-direction. The most accepted definition of guidance today is “a process of helping an individual to equip himself to know his needs, assess his potentialities, develop the purposes, formulate the plans of actions and proceed to realize these under the most favourable conditions provided by the environment”.

Guidance services may be needed for various personal, psychological and sociological reasons. If guidance services are not provided properly it may result into wastage of time, money and energy.

Counselling is one of the services of guidance programme. It is often referred to as the heart of guidance programme. According to Hahn and McLeon, “*Counselling is a process which takes place in a one-to-one relationship between an individual troubled by problem with which he cannot cope alone and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help other reach solutions to various types of personal problems*”.

For implementing inclusive education successfully, parents of child with special needs require guidance for various tasks in general and counselling in particular as a result of

psycho-social implications of their children's' disabilities. At the same time the peers of a child with special needs also require counselling to accept the child with special needs as an equal partner in the class.

Counselling to Parents

Family adaptation to the birth or diagnosis of a child with special need depends on various factors. It appears to be a combination of cultural, social, legal, economic or psychological processes which affect the family and its individual members as they attempt to meet the unique needs of the child with special needs. Very often it takes a long time for the parents to come in terms with and accept the situation and the tag caused by the disability. During counselling the special teacher should consider the personal coping style of each family, the larger system within which the family functions and cultural beliefs, attitudes and values. One factor that affects the parent's ability to cope with stress may be the nature and degree of disability and their professional commitments.

The emergence of expectance and adaptation of the child with special needs is a multifaceted process. Counselling to parents may be given by the special teacher through careful analysis of individual contexts and variables. The support systems within and in the extended family may have a significant impact on the family's ability to cope with the situation. Grand-parents may be a source of emotional support which enables the family to withstand the stress of the child with special needs. However, grand parents with their images of 'Perfect'- grand children may become an additional source of stress to some parents. Through counselling the parents develop a greater understanding of the child and his or her strength and weaknesses.

In addition to the counselling in above mentioned areas parents need counseling in other areas i.e., must know the rights and duties as the parents of child with special needs.

- They have a right to choose a school for their child.
- Parents who have children with autism, cerebral palsy, multiple disabilities can work collectively towards forming their own association.
- Parents of a child with disabilities have relaxations in income tax.
- Parents who are government employees are entitled to certain benefits in the jobs, transfers and other government policies.
- There is a procedure for redressed of their problems too.
- They are told about the vocational opportunities available for their children

- They are told about the procurement of disability certificates.
- About the various government schemes and facilities available.

Counselling to Peers

The major issue underlying inclusion is the acceptance of diversity. The concept of inclusion is based on the recognition that we live in a society of increasing diversity where success will come to the children who learn to work and live cooperative with others. A significant resource for helping all children to learn successfully is the use of what has been called peer power. It is recognized that peer acceptance is one of the essential feature of inclusive education. So, different peer group counselling packages should be developed in teachers' workshop aimed to promote supportive pupils' interaction in inclusive setting. The teachers have certain responsibilities inherent in their role as educator whether special teacher or general teacher and the most important among them are to create a climate of acceptance for child with special needs within classroom. They must accommodate the student and adjust the learning environment in response to children with special needs. As we all know that the attitudes of non-handicapped peers have an impact-upon the education of children with special needs as well as their own education itself. It is generally agreed that school should emphasize and act on the development of appropriate attitude among non-handicapped towards children with special needs. Johnson & Johnson (1984) suggest that appropriate attitudes towards the handicapped are those which promote the ability to carry on transactions with the environment that result in maintaining oneself growing and flourishing. There are several pre-interaction factors, which seem to affect the acceptance of children with special need. Students may be reacting to the stigma associated with being handicapped or the stereotyping which result of labelling the children with special needs. Sometimes students may derive their negative impression from their last experience. There are several techniques which are helpful in efforts to change attitudes toward the children with special needs. Three most commonly recommended strategies for changing attitudes are described below (Watts, 1984).

a) Persuasive communication

b) Personal contact

c) Role playing

Persuasive communications are more effective when several factors are considered in its implementation. First, the source of the communication must be credible. It is more effective

if opposition arguments are ignored and participants are not forwarded to the purpose of presentation. Persuasive communication in the form of group discussion, active participation and lecture-cum-discussion format are used.

Personal contact is the most widely studied attitude change method. Personal contact techniques

include social contact, direct contact in an educational setting and contact through film, video, and audio tape.

Role playing techniques can also be used to have students experience of the role of children with disabilities. In this technique role playing the disabling condition and observation of others have equal importance in changing the attitude successfully. For example, students may observe visually impaired students playing basket –ball. The most effective way to increase positive attitude towards children with special needs in regular classroom is through cooperative learning experience and peer tutoring. Peer tutoring is instruction provided by the peers of students and involves children teaching other children usually on one-to-one basis. Cross-age and same age tutoring can be adopted in peer tutoring. Cross age tutoring refers to instructional situations in which the student tutor provides instruction to younger students of a lower grade while same age

tutoring is instruction that involves students of the same age or grade on the tutoring.

In peer tutoring, the tutor should perform four acts-

1. **Monitoring** - means supervision and regulation of the performance of a tutee
2. **Reinforcing** - means providing appropriate contingencies for approved behavior. She/he may praise the tutee if she/he has completed the work to a required standard.
3. **Modelling** - means the demonstration of a particular activity or behavior by the peer tutor.
4. **Explaining** - means the peer tutor should expose the relationship on a topic and provide appropriate examples to clarify doubts. The success of peer tutoring depends upon the interpersonal and communicative relationships between peers. In peer tutoring the tutor plays an important role in the instructional process, it is the teacher who virtually retains all the responsibility for selecting the tutors, orienting them about their crucial role, matching the tutor with the tutee, directing, organizing, coordinating and evaluating the performance of tutorial project. The teacher should follow the guidelines for establishing a peer-tutoring progressive.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning occurs when children share responsibility and resources, as well as when they work toward common goals. The development of cooperative group skills

involves time, practice, and reinforcement of appropriate behaviours. The teacher plays an important role in establishing a supportive environment, one in which children feel they can take risks, and an environment where all children's opinions are valued.

Counselling to Children with Special Needs

Counselling of child with special needs is very important. It is the role of the special teacher to find out the reasons/factors why the child with special needs is not progressing according to her/his potential. Special teacher who helps the child with special needs to cope up with the environment and also helps to build confidence within her-/him-self.

Special teacher should provide counselling to children with special needs in the following areas:

- Proper use of aid and appliances
- Care and maintenance of the same
- Acceptance to oneself
- Encourage to participate in different activities organized by school
- Monitor the performance of children with special need and guide accordingly

Conclusion

Inclusive education should not be considered merely a special approach that shows us how a few chosen learners – e.g. children with disabilities – can be integrated in the mainstream education, but it should be considered a paradigm shift in the overall societal attitude and approach towards children with all diversities. This attitude should lead to transform the regular education system in order to respond to different learners in a constructive and positive way. Such attitude and resultant endeavours should be collective journey wherein everyone in the society joins. Special Teachers' responsibility towards the success of inclusive education is not limited to assessment of children with special needs and to work with them. Instead they have a much wider role and an array of activities to perform for contributing towards the goal of inclusive education. They need to provide guidance and counselling not only to children with special needs but also to their peers and parents to ensure the creation of a facilitative and enriching psychosocial environment and to ensure support of the significant people in the immediate environment of the children with special needs. They have to spare some time from their busy schedule for maintaining records of the children with special needs so that various professionals/agencies providing help to these

children at various stages of their lives have access to valid and authentic information about these children.

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