

Towards Inclusive Schooling

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Introduction

'To realize that you were sleeping you have to get awake'

A society is inclusive if it enables every person in society to participate in normal activities of that society with adequate share of resources, and participation in the determination of how to share these resources. Hence social inclusion concerns with capabilities people enjoy or fail to enjoy. Social exclusion can be defined in different ways, economic exclusion, political exclusion and exclusion from social participation. If individuals or communities are excluded from the society in general, in terms of social interaction and participation it is referred to as “social marginalisation”. Social exclusion results when individuals or groups feel inability to participate effectively in economic, social and cultural life, and in some characteristics, alienation and distance from mainstream society.

Inclusion in education has adopted different meanings as indicated by the difference in terminology- Social inclusion, inclusive education and educational inclusion. Lately the preferred meaning of educational inclusion is related to the concept of effective schools; i.e., an inclusive school is considered as the effective school. For example Jha (2002) proposed two distinct perspectives on inclusive education. The first view from the developed countries, and the second, owes to the felt need and circumstances prevailing in the developing world. The discourse on inclusive education in developed countries centers on special education, or at most a reform in special education. The second, an educational reform perspectives see inclusive school as responding to diverse needs of all children catering to children’s learning styles and needs. Ferguson (1996), Udavi-Solner (1996), Thomas et al (1998), Ainscow (1999) and Mittler (2000) have extensively dealt on the school reforms perspective.

Despite progress in improving children's life chances, large numbers of children and young people are still missing out on opportunities. More is to be done to break the cycle of social exclusion. We continue to fail to increase the mobility between generations and hence to give children the ability to develop their potential to the full. This paper discusses a model to improve the nature of schooling and improve educational outcomes for students by creating sustainable change and improvement into mainstream schooling practice. There are three focus areas: home, school and classroom. Home: environment –economic, intellectual, educational; School: distance, facilities, planning, organization, co-ordination; Classroom: teaching strategies, teacher support, grouping, assignments. This paper discusses an initial outline of an effective and inclusive school that fits the socio-economic and educational ethos of the Kerala society, which will eventually lead to a framework which can be used to review the educational processes within all our schools.

Framework for an effective and inclusive school for all

The move towards the development of schools (Ainscow, 1999) needs support and encouragement (Ainscow, 2005) as it involves a social learning process in a locality that influences thinking and action of people involved. Ainscow (2005) identifies four features of inclusion in educational system. a) Inclusion is a process (of learning). b) It is about identifying and removing barriers. c) It is for presence, participation and achievement of all students. d) It involves particular emphasis on students at risk of exclusion, underachievement or marginalization which in turn calls for monitoring based on continuous and rich data.

According to Sebba and Ainscow (1996) inclusion describes the process by which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization

and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend and, in so doing, reduces the need to exclude pupils (p.9).

UNESCO World Conference argued that a school should “...accommodate *all children* regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized area and groups” (UNESCO, 1994, Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p.6).

These inclusive schools, “... must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities” (UNESCO, 1994, Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p.11-12).

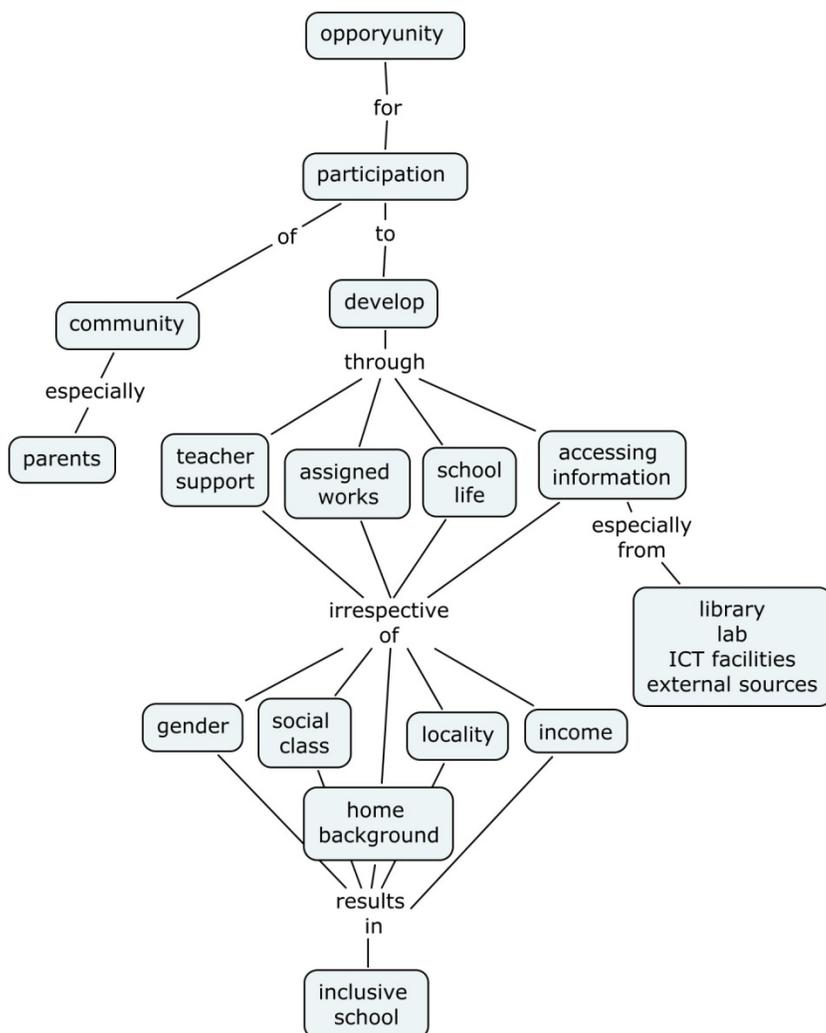


Figure 1: Important considerations in the development of a model of an effective and inclusive school for all

Poverty, gender and locality

Poverty adversely affects children's outcomes in different ways. Poor parents have little time, money or energy to devote to developing children's human capital; they have little time for supervising children. Poor parents are less able to buy local resources for their children and fewer networks. Is it possible to separate these effects out from what he calls the 'family culture'? Cultural capital may be as important as parental education in helping children to

navigate the education system. Where there is a culture which encourages aspirations, children will flourish, even when living in poverty.

In spite of the movements to empower women on all aspects of life, even in state like Kerala which are relatively better off on human development index and gender equity index wide disparity exists between the genders. How many of our schools provide infrastructural facilities required for girls students at par with that of boys? To what extent our schools and other centers of education participate equally the girl children in physical education, science fairs, youth festival, excursions and other aspects of school life?

The most school systems are confronting two types of barriers, external and internal (Jha, 2002). Children face external barriers before coming to and getting enrolled in schools. The nature of such barriers could be physical location of schools, social stigmatization or economic conditions of children. Sometimes non-availability of school or its location in area that cannot be accessed becomes the major barrier for children to get education. Geographical location, distance to school, transport facilities still worries parents while making a choice regarding to which school the child is to be enrolled in.

Aspirations , expectations and parental involvement

A truly inclusive school has to consider all its pupils' aspirations and the expectations and of their parents. If we are to break the cycle of social exclusion we need to know more about how young people formulate their life goals and how this relates to their parents' and others' expectations for them. Young people's aspirations have been shown to influence educational attainment, career choices and future earnings (Clausen, 1995; Schoon and Parsons, 2002). They are instrumental in charting a life course and in focusing time and energy. The importance of aspirations may be explained to some extent by the fact that social class, culture, and gender

differences cause a difference in it. Development we know is influenced by both individual and contextual factors, including the overall socio-historical context that dictates opportunities and possibilities (Schoon and Parsons, 2002, p. 281). If the schools are to break the cycle of social exclusion those working with it need to know more about how children formulate their life goals and how this relates to their parents' and others' expectations for them.

Whereas parental involvement is related to school achievement, educational failure is associated with lack of parental interest. Fathers' interest is strongly linked to educational outcomes (Flouri and Buchanan, 2002). Parental involvement has a significant effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors, such as social class, maternal expectations, are excluded. Differences in parental involvement have a much bigger impact on achievement than differences associated with the school in primary age range. Parental involvement continues to have a significant effect through the age range (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Active parental involvement in young people's education tails off in terms of successful outcomes once they enter secondary school (Crozier, 1999; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). At this stage, communicating aspiration may be more important than active involvement in the learning process because, at this age parents may not feel that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to assist, for example, with homework (Welsh et al., 2004). To break the cycle of social exclusion we need to know more about how young people formulate their life goals and how this relates to their parents' and others' expectations for them. But inclusive schools realize that the most important form of involvement is what Desforges and Abouchaar (2003, p.1) describe as "at-home good parenting"; and that poor parents have little time, money or energy to devote to developing children's human capital (Feinstein, 2003).

Teacher support

The influence of parents or teachers as role models is well discussed. Disadvantaged children want to be provided with sufficient information to make their own decisions about future aspirations. Teacher support is an integral part in class room learning activities specifically in providing reinforcement, preparing assignments, seminars and projects, providing guidelines while collecting content related materials and presenting the products of class room activities. This is the spectrum which may subject to the chances of exclusion to some students. In a class room situation many students may experience exclusion from the part of the teacher during and outside the classroom activities. In classroom, teachers ought to provide equal opportunities to all students irrespective of their gender, locality, class, caste and economic status. This is the only way that leads to social inclusion. Teacher support enhance school engagement.

Teachers need to ‘believe they can make a difference and have a commitment to do so ... [and have] a belief in the capacity of all students to make progress, given sufficient time and support’ (Hill & Crevola, 1998). Inclusive classroom teachers know their students and understand their learning needs. They are able to adapt current pedagogical knowledge and thinking and apply it in different ways, so that each student is engaged in meaningful learning experiences.

Information and Communication Technology

The phrase “digital divide” has been applied to the gap that exists in most countries between those with ready access to the tools of information and communication technologies, and the knowledge that they provide access to, and those without such access or skills. This may be because of socio-economic factors, geographical factors, educational, attitudinal and generational factors, or it may be through physical disabilities. A further gap between the

developed and underdeveloped world in the uptake of technology is evident within the global community, and may be of even greater significance. Key demographic variables like income and education drive are the policy questions surrounding the Internet. These variables are important because they are the most likely to have a differential impact on the consequences of interactive electronic media for different segments in our society. Inclusive schools must be able to compensate social digital divide. According to Calder and Cope (2004) disadvantaged young people wanted to be provided with sufficient information to make their own decisions about future aspirations. If aspirations are considered to be dreams, it is difficult to dream about something about which we do not know. We need to give children the 'stuff of dreams'. Where families have few or no qualifications, their children need more access to the internet.

School environment

Effective and inclusive schools are engaging, recognizing and responding to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating different learning profiles and rates of learning and intervening early to identify and respond to individual student needs. Learning takes place within the social context of the school, which has a significant impact on both the quality and the opportunity for learning. Student engagement and school connectedness underpin effective student learning. Student engagement can be behavioural, emotional and cognitive (DEECD, 1999). Behavioural engagement refers to students' participation in education, including the academic, social and extracurricular activities of the school. Emotional engagement encompasses students' emotional reactions in the classroom and in the school. It can be defined as students' sense of belonging or connectedness to the school. Cognitively student must be engaged as evidenced in students' investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.

Ensuring presence in the school

Inclusive schools purposefully create and promote an awareness that absence results in quantifiable lost learning time and opportunities. Effective schools promote and maintain high levels of student attendance and participation through understanding of the causal factors of absence, ensuring student attendance is recorded twice per day in primary schools and in every class in secondary schools. Early identification of vulnerable students and those at risk of disengagement from school is one of the first steps for change into the proposed inclusive model of school. Inclusive school has to establish social/emotional and educational support for vulnerable students and monitor and evaluate progress. Prevention strategies are established targeting the whole school community, and designed to reduce any risk factors that may contribute to attendance or behavioral issues while at the same time increasing protective factors. Prevention strategies are based on a comprehensive knowledge of the community's and students' needs and therefore provide a solid platform for inclusive educational provision. Schools appreciate and utilize the potential strengths and expertise of school community members. Transparent and immediate follow-up of individual student absences and immediate follow-up of any problems identified by students and parents are done. Formal but flexible procedures for supporting the learning of a student absent for an extended period are established.

Curricular strategies

Inclusive schools use variety of innovative practices to get children involved and participating in learning processes (Jha, 2002, p.140). Some of the inclusion strategies are Whole class inclusive teaching, Group/cooperative/collaborative learning, Peer tutoring/child-to-child learning, Activity based learning, Team approach/problem solving, and Equity in assessment/examinations. Co-operation, sharing, respect being the watch words, competition among schools and among the pupils are both against the spirit of inclusion. Staff in the inclusive

schools has to continually seek and get proficient in engaging and in participating all the students.

Out-of-school learning

Achievers are distinguishable from non achievers in the quantity and quality of academic time available, academically engaged time, time devoted to school, family, peers, mass media. Student outcomes depend on participation in structured activities and religious activities and the time spent interacting with adults. Time spent on homework, basic understanding of academic subjects, difficulty level of homework, tutoring, extra morning and evening sessions, interest or necessary skills, motivation, frustration and concentration are factors that can be directly or indirectly modified by the school. Learning facilities available at home, educational qualifications of parents and siblings and a host of community- child risk factors, family risk factors and neighborhood risk factors influence the time devoted to different aspects of life. An inclusive and effective school must be able to determine factors which prevent the students from participating in academics in order to motivate and engage students even after the school hours because adolescents have unmonitored time and time is the fundamental resource.

For a review of the ideas elaborated above, the inter-relation among the important input, process and product elements in an inclusive and effective school is summarized in Figure2.

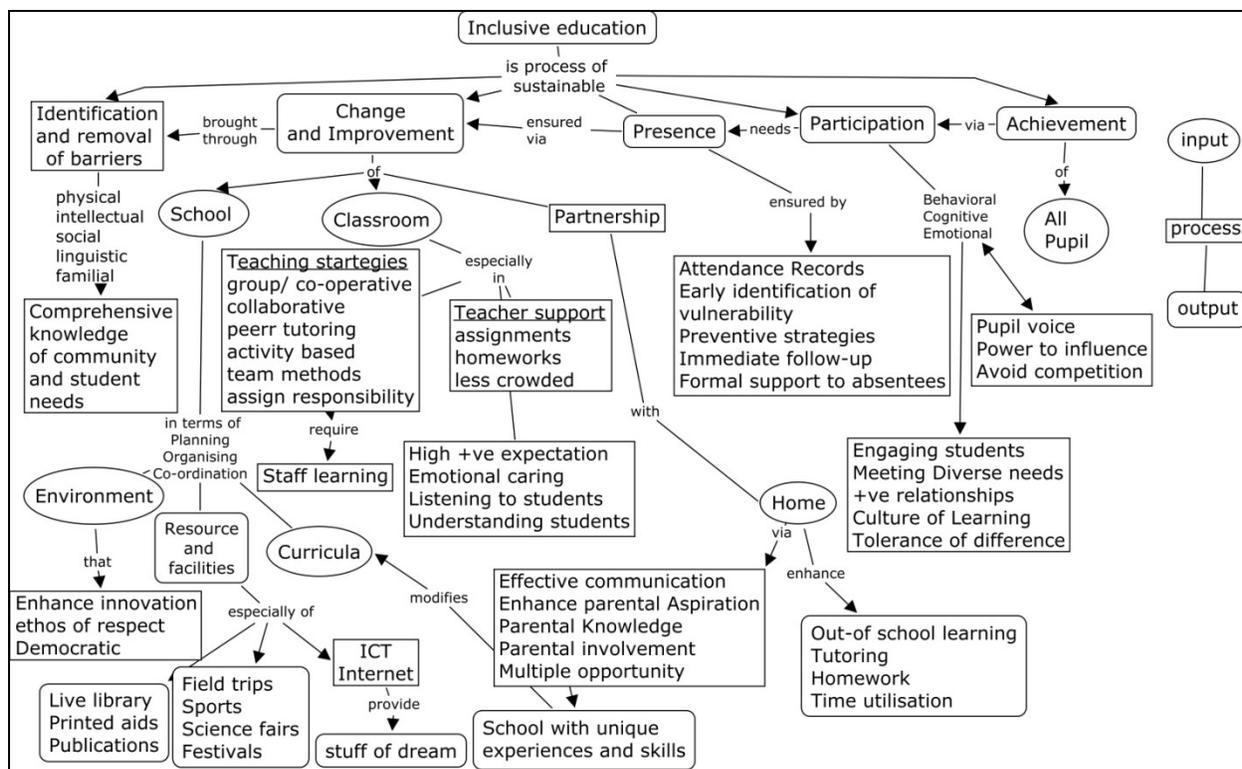


Figure 2: Relationship among the important input, process and product elements in an inclusive and effective school

Conclusion

Chances are improving for the majority; the gap may be increasing between them and those who are left behind. Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are often excluded from forms of education regarded as most valuable, and from gaining qualifications that can be exchanged for good employment, income and security. There is, in particular, a growing awareness that creating competitive markets in education, with schools competing for the most desirable pupils and resources, is incompatible with inclusive education (Foreword by Sally Tomlinson in Jha, 2002). It is important to create in adolescents a belief that their work will make a difference to current and a future prospect is important. Unless people believe that they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 2001). It is probable that in situations of extreme intergenerational

disadvantage, many parents and children give up hope because they feel that whatever they do, will make no difference. Schools need to think more about the psychology of social exclusion, the depression born of blocked opportunities and the need to relearn hope through positive and new experiences.

Suggestions for movement of schools towards better inclusion

- A common understanding regarding the importance of adopting new, and well-documented approaches to the teaching and learning of all students
- School community needs to be proactive in systematically linking school and learning with the home, the previous school and the wider community.
- School community has to further acknowledge the close relationship between educational outcomes and poverty, health, housing and access to government services and infrastructure development.
- Strong corporation between the school and community will support parents to actively involved in the decision-making and planning of education of children
- Parents who have understanding about why decisions have been taken and how decisions are to be implemented are likely to promote changes proposed and accept the responsibilities that they can
- There needs to be a consistent understanding of school priorities and the importance of a new initiative in these priorities
- Inclusive schools must be flexible and stimulating environment for all to support genuine learning and achievement of all students. Respect and concern for the needs of all must be visible in the every day practices of school , allocation of time, staff and resources.

- Inclusive schools provide students with a sense of ownership of their environment, and unique experiences and skills of their students' families enrich the learning environment and the school community. This is not about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about having the power to influence change.
- Engagement- i.e.; relationships: teachers with students, teachers with each other, teachers with parents, the school with the community, students with students and the student with the curriculum- is the most influential factor in school improvement.
- Safe and supportive school/community environment with a respect and concern for the needs of others gives a greater chance of inclusion of all
- Schools and communities need to ensure that flexible structures and resourcing prevail that enable participation of all in a range of high-quality learning experiences.
- Curriculum needs to be dynamic and responsive to the development of essential knowledge, skills and attitudes in all students
- Educators in inclusive schools know, understand and can work collaboratively with their students
- Continuous monitoring and recording of student progress and achievement in curriculum and social areas are vital
- Provide structured teaching and learning programmes to young people's developmental needs; with high expectations and standards.
- Match teaching to the needs and strengths of the learner and recognize that even with the best teaching, some students will need additional support.
- A range of strategies, including one-on-one and small group teaching, individualized learning programmes, mentoring programmes and parent /community support, must be considered.

- Classroom organization should recognize differences in learning styles, needs, performance levels, areas of interest and general capacities.
- Schools and classrooms have clear expectations of individual responsibility and foster positive relationships among students. Physical, Personal and Social Learning, encourages students to work with others, and to take greater responsibility for their own learning and participation at school.
- Schools should also encourage and provide multiple opportunities for parents and members of the broader community to play an active part in the life of the school and the education of their children

It is to be borne in mind that the meaning and practical implications of the strategies recommended will only be evident when it is practiced in the field. For this to occur, head teachers of inclusive schools have to lead by example but responsibility for diversity and inclusion is shared amongst staff, students, and parents. They have to demonstrate a 'can do' culture in relation to change, being responsive to new policies and initiatives to promote inclusion. Data are regularly monitored to ensure that all children succeed. The achievements of all pupils must be celebrated. Schools have to learn to understand and take seriously the views and aspirations of young people. Students want their teachers to recognize them as individuals, not just as learners. Tolerance and respect have to be the core values of the school philosophy. In essence inclusive schools are democratic which engage all students, set high expectations, seek feedback from students and "give out two messages to every child – 'you can succeed' and 'I will help you do that'.

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