

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PROGRAMMES AND PROVISIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a practice of teaching handicapped children in regular classrooms with non-handicapped children to the fullest extent possible; such children may have orthopedic, intellectual, emotional, or visual difficulties or handicaps associated with hearing or learning. In India there are constitutional provisions for Inclusive Education. Education is the right of all children, and IE aims to ensure that all children have access to an appropriate, relevant, affordable and effective education within their community. This education starts in the home with the family, and includes formal, non-formal and all types of community-based education initiatives. Article 14, Article 21A, The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 of the Indian Constitution clarifies that "all" includes children with disabilities as well. This article will discuss Concept of inclusive education, Specific Terms in inclusive education such as Impairment, Disability, Special Educational Needs, Learning Difficulty, Mental Handicap, Indian Constitution about Inclusive Education, Reasons For Inclusion, The inclusive education programmes under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Provisions for CWSN (Children With Special Needs) under SSA and a case study on inclusive education.

Key words: Inclusive education, Impairment, Disability, Special Educational Needs, Learning Difficulty, Mental Handicap, Reasons For Inclusion, Provisions, A Case Study on Inclusive Education.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is

- a philosophy built on the belief that all people are equal and should be respected and valued, as an issue of basic human rights.
- an "unending set of processes" in which children and adults with disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in all community activities offered to people who do not have disabilities (UNESCO, 1997).

Inclusive education is a practice of teaching handicapped children in regular classrooms with non-handicapped children to the fullest extent possible; such children may have orthopedic, intellectual, emotional, or visual difficulties or handicaps associated with hearing or learning. It differs from previously held notions of 'integration' and 'mainstreaming', which tended to be concerned principally with disability and 'special educational needs' and implied learners changing or becoming 'ready for accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept. It is about,

- rejecting segregation or exclusion of learners for whatever reason-ability, gender, language, care status, family income, disability, sexuality, colour, religion or ethnic origin;
- maximizing the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice;
- making learning more meaningful and relevant for all, particularly those learners most vulnerable to exclusionary pressures;
- rethinking and restructuring policies, curricula, cultures and practices in schools and learning environments so that diverse learning needs can be met, whatever the origin or nature of those needs.

Education being one of the primary determiners of our lives, which enables us to achieve further goals, the necessity to find out the status of education scenario as far as persons with disabilities are concerned was felt from the very beginning.

The benefits of inclusive education

- Families' visions of a typical life for their children can come true.

All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead "regular" lives. Inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.

- Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others.

When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding grow when children of differing abilities and cultures play and learn together.

- Friendships develop.

Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills. Children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other in inclusive classes.

- Children learn important academic skills.

In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected to learn to read, write and do math. With higher expectations and good instruction children with disabilities learn academic skills.

- All children learn by being together.

Because the philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a nurturing learning environment.

Review of related studies

Sixteen years ago the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education endorsed the idea of inclusive education. Salamanca Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are 'the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all'. Furthermore, it suggests that such schools can 'provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system' (UNESCO, 1994).

Inclusion has been advocated for children with disabilities (Bunch & Valeo, 1997; Helmstetter, Peck, & Giangreco, 1994; Hunt & Goetz, 1997) where students with disabilities

learn alongside their age-appropriate peers in general education classrooms with appropriate aids and services (Gilhool, 1989).

Much of the studies on inclusive education have been carried out in the United Kingdom, it has also involved projects in countries diverse such as Brazil, China, India, Romania, Spain and Zambia (Ainscow, 2000a). These have focused on: the development of classroom practice (e.g. Ainscow, 1999 and 2000b); school development (e.g. Ainscow, 1995; Ainscow, Barrs & Martin, 1998, Booth & Ainscow, 2002); teacher development (e.g. Ainscow, 1994; 2002); leadership practices and systemic change, particularly in respect to the role of school districts (e.g. Ainscow & Howes, 2001; Ainscow & Tweddle, 2003). At the same time, through the work of the Enabling Education Network (EENET), it has encouraged links between groups around the world that are trying to encourage the development of inclusive education (Further details can be obtained from www.eenet.org.uk).

Indian Constitution about Inclusive Education

- Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees right to equality; equality being the cornerstone of inclusion, segregation in education on the basis of ability is a violation of the right to equality of the person with disability.
- Article 21A of the Constitution guarantees access to education as a fundamental right.
- The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act 2002 makes it mandatory for the Government to provide free and compulsory education to "all children of the age of 6-14 years"; the preamble of the Act clarifies that "all" includes children with disabilities as well.

Yet inevitably again, vital loose ends of such enabling policies and legislation are not tied up. Contemporary India is one of the few countries worldwide where the education of disabled children doesn't fall within the purview of the Human Resource Development Ministry. It is the burden of the omnibus Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MHRD, 2006).

The prime focus of the Union ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is rehabilitation, not education. In fact, till

today it does not have education as part of its agenda and the issue of education of children with disabilities remains invisible, hidden from the public domain, a private problem for families and NGOs to deal with. It's time that government agencies as well as mainstream institutions woke up to the reality that segregation of children is morally unjustifiable and a violation of human rights. Indeed there is no other way to provide education to 36 million disabled children. Seventy-eight percent of our population lives in rural areas. Where is the money for special schools there? Therefore inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community and the central and state governments have to train their teachers to manage inclusive classrooms.

Quite clearly the seeds of the rapidly growing global movement for inclusive education have germinated in India where a massive population of 80 million citizens including 40 million children have been callously excluded from the education system, and consequently from the national development process. One of the beneficial fallouts of the communications revolution has been the free flow of ideas, concepts and development models across national borders. Research studies around the world and NRCI's pilot project in Mumbai have clearly demonstrated that inclusive education is not only imperative on the grounds of morality, social justice and equity but also makes economic sense. With the Kochi Declaration of Jan 31, 2003 having drawn up a clear road map for implementing the much-delayed Education For All agenda, an opportunity for translating politically correct EFA rhetoric into classroom reality has devolved upon the central and state governments-and citizens-across the country.

Ten Reasons For Inclusion

Human Rights

- All children have the right to learn together.
- Children should not be devalued or discriminated against by being excluded or sent away because of their disability or learning difficulty.
- Disabled adults, describing themselves as special school survivors, are demanding an end to segregation.
- There are no legitimate reasons to separate children for their education. Children belong together-with advantages and benefits for everyone. They do not need to be protected from each other.

Good Education

- Research shows children do better, academically and socially in integrated settings.
- There is no teaching or care in a segregated school, which cannot take place in an ordinary school.
- Given commitment and support, inclusive education is a more efficient use of educational resources.

Good Social Sense

- Segregation teaches children to be fearful, ignorant and breeds prejudice.
- All children need an education that will help them develop relationships and prepare them for life in the mainstream.
- Only inclusion has the potential to reduce fear and build friendship, respect and understanding (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), Bristol, United Kingdom).

The Inclusive Education programmes under SSA

- The percentage of CWSN (Children With Special Needs) identified seems to be low, being only 1.54 % of the total child population in SSA in comparison to Census 2001 data, wherein 2.1% of the population has been found to have some disability. Hence, States should streamline their identification procedures.
- Retention of CWSN after their identification and enrollment should be monitored and encouraged so that they complete the cycle of elementary education.
- States to maintain their efforts to provide more assistive devices to CWSN as 76.4% children have got the required equipment.
- Effective monitoring mechanisms should be developed by the States to assess both the quantitative and qualitative progress and problems in IE.
- Emphasis should now be on classroom practices and

teaching methods adopted by teachers for effective classroom management of CWSN.

- To ensure that every child with special needs receives continuing on site support.
- Involvement of more NGOs in the IE programme of SSA needs to be strengthened.
- Only 47.14% schools have been made barrier-free. This aspect of IE in SSA needs more focus.
- Although States have increased pace of expenditure; it needs to be further geared up.

Provisions for CWSN under SSA

SSA provides upto Rs.1200/- per child for the inclusion of disabled children, as per specific proposal, per year. District plan for children with special needs is formulated within the Rs.1200/- per child norm. The interventions under SSA for inclusive education are identification, functional and formal assessment, appropriate educational placement, preparation of Individualized Educational Plan, provision of aids and appliances, teacher training, resource support, removal of architectural barriers, research, monitoring and evaluation and a special focus on girls with special needs.

SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy. This means that no child having special needs should be deprived of the right to education and taught in an environment, which is best, suited to his/her learning needs. These include special schools, EGS, AIE or even home-based education.

The major thrust of SSA is on inclusion or mainstreaming CWSN into the fabric of formal elementary schooling. Experiences of programmes like DPEP and various research findings have shown that inclusion is best determined by the individual needs of the child. Most children with special needs can be enrolled and retained in regular schools if adequate resource support is provided to them, whereas there are others who might have to be provided some kind of pre-integration programmes, before they can be mainstreamed in a classroom. There might also be still some CWSN with severe profound disabilities, who would require an educational programme and intensive

specialized support completely beyond the purview and scope of a formal school in the current situation.

Thus, SSA has adopted a more expansive and a broad-based understanding of the concept of inclusion, wherein a multi-option model of educating CWSN is being implemented. The dual objective of embracing this model is to bring more CWSN under the umbrella of SSA and to provide to CWSN appropriate need based skills, be it vocational, functional literacy or simply activities of daily living. Further, an attempt is being made to provide these skills in the most appropriate learning environment (PROBE, 1999).

A case study on Inclusive Education

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine how co-teaching/cooperative teaching enables students with and without disabilities to learn together.
- Examine how students with and without disabilities interact in integrated school settings.
- Investigate the involvement of families in integrated settings.
- Explore the extent to which the Whole School Approach can be applied to local integrated schools.
- Identify the educational needs of school personnel in integrated settings.

Four schools (including 3 primary schools and one secondary school) participated in this study. Students with disabilities in the targeted schools included those with: hearing impairment, physical handicap, mild grade intellectual disability and autism with average intelligence. Interviews, observations, questionnaires and document collection within target schools have been used to collect data.

The study raises a call for more commitment from schools and the Education Department for the support and implementation of integration policy, as there is still a lack of understanding and concern about resources in the community and in schools about Integrated Education. The study recommended institutions to provide professional development programmes for principals, teachers, parents and children. For example, provide in-

service and pre-service teacher education; develop different kinds of workshops; conduct regular sharing meetings for both teachers and parents and establish a management team to facilitate the implement of integration. For students, the study suggested schools instigate and maintain well-prepared social interaction scheme to help the integration of student with disabilities into regular schools.

Implications for practice and recommendations

This study provided a snapshot of the experiences of youth with physical disabilities in integrated school settings. Further research is needed to examine the experiences of children with other types of disabilities and learning styles. Based on this study, the author recommend that governments continue in their efforts to enforce their civil rights, laws and provide resources to meet them. Similarly, school boards need to develop inclusive policies and procedures and direct resources to that effort. Principals need to ensure that their schools are fully inclusive and take a lead role in modeling inclusive attitudes and behaviors. Teachers need to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to adapt their teaching to include all children and the willingness to learn about the experiences of children with disabilities. Finally, we all need to stop and listen to students with disabilities to better understand their realities. We need to provide the necessary effort, educational policies, and resources to ensure that our values and principles are met.

Conclusion

Some programmes could focus specifically on educational provision for children with disabilities, others could mainstream disability alongside gender and other exclusionary dimensions such as poverty. This would ensure the inclusion of all in programmes intended to widen the impact of institutional systems such as education. With the development of much-needed research into the inclusive education discourse and the implementation and outcomes of IE policy, reconceptualisation of inclusive education as a whole school quality issue for all children may be able to grow alongside this merging of agendas. Thus, EFA and the Fundamental Right to education for all children as declared by the 86th Constitutional amendment

in 2002 may be fulfilled in the long-term through the improved implementation of inclusive education.

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