Inclusive Education in Indian Context

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Abstract

Inclusive education lays the foundation to an inclusive society accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity. The present paper traces the concept of inclusive education in Indian context. The paper throws light on the International and National level Policy frameworks and Legislations in inclusive education. The paper critically reviews need of inclusive education in India and role of schools in inclusive education.

Introduction

Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed *for children without disabilities* (Kugelmass, 2004). It refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The range of challenges confronting the school system while including children with diverse abilities and from diverse backgrounds have to be met by creating child centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children. It leads to the development of social skills and better social interactions because learners are exposed to real environment in which they have to interact with other learners each one having unique characteristics, interests and abilities. The non-disabled peers adopt positive attitudes and actions towards learners with disabilities as a result of studying together in an inclusive classroom.

The inevitable presence of differences among students mean that school needs to become more comfortable with building inclusive communities that value diversity. In Barton's words, "difference is now to be viewed as a challenge, a means of generating change and an encouragement for people to question unfounded generalisations, prejudice and discrimination" (Barton, 1997). So a reconstruction in school organisation and curriculum is required so that the school becomes a supportive community to educate all children. This changing paradigm assumes a different set of beliefs and assumptions that demand different practices in schools (Carrington, 1999). Inclusion involves all

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students having the right to be truly included, to actively participate with others in the learning experiences provided, to be valued as the members of school community and to have access to a system that delivers a quality education that is best suited to their unique competencies, skills and attributes. (Ainscow 2000, Farrell, 2000; Fisher, D., Roach, V. and Frey, N., 2002).

Inclusive education is about listening to the voices in a school community and empowering all members to develop an approach to schooling that is committed to identifying and dismantling actual and potential sources of exclusion (Slee, 2003a). Moreover, it is about a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect (Carrington, 2000). Indeed, Ballard (1995) argues that inclusion is unending, so that there is no such thing as an inclusive school.

The concept of inclusion has developed from a long history of educational innovation and represents school improvements on many levels for all students (Skrtic, T.M., Sailor, W. and Gee, K., 1996). The several theories dealing with the democratic community (Dewey, 1916) provide opportunities to rethink how one can improve acceptance of differences and create communities inclusive of all members of society (Turner and Louis, 1996). An inclusive learning society should foster collaboration, problem solving, self-directed learning and critical discourse (Skrtic, T.M., Sailor, W. and Gee, K., 1996). Stereotypic differences create divisions and status systems that detract from the democratic nature of society and

the dignity of the individual (Gillies and Carrington, 2004). Communities in inclusive schools cooperate and collaborate for the common good of all (Apple and Beane, 1995). In inclusive schools difference is recognised, respected and represented (Slee, 2001b). In essence, inclusive education is about the 'politics of representation' (Slee, 2001a) or how students can be given a voice in the construction of their own unique identities (Trueba et al., 1997).

The inclusive schools demand reconstructed educational thinking and practice in regular schools for the benefit of all students (Slee, 2001b). This involves reconstructing and realigning the whole system and the entire component parts so that "assessment, curriculum, instruction, professional development, program evaluation and accountability… work synergistically to ensure meaningful and sustained school improvement" (Smith, 1998).

Concept of Inclusive Education

In schools throughout the world, 'inclusion' has been used to refer to the placement of students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms alongside their peers (Kugelmass, 2004). Inclusive education has become well rooted in the general education reform agenda (Roach, 1991) because both areas incorporate school change and improvement (Fisher, Sax, Rodifer and Pumpian, 1999).

Inclusive Education is a process of increasing the participation of all students in school, including those with disabilities (Ainscow 2000). It is about restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond

to the diversity of students in their locality. In its broadest and all encompassing meaning, inclusive education, as an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It implies all learners, young people - with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. This is possible only in a flexible education system that assimilates the needs of a diverse range of learners and adapts itself to meet these needs. It aims at all stakeholders in the system (learners, parents, and community, teachers, and administrators, policy makers) to be comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge rather than a problem. Inclusive education is about all children learning together even if they differ from each other in styles and pace of learning. It is a dynamic process because it addresses all aspects of child development-emotional, physical, intellectual, creative, social etc. It is about celebrating diversity and changing the rigid school system in order to meet the needs of all children. In an inclusive class all children appear to be happy and participating.

Inclusion can be viewed from three perspectives in Indian context:

● Physical inclusion
● Social inclusion
● Cognitive inclusion

Physical inclusion receives consistent promotion, support and facilitation from the government. All the policies and regulations have made education free and compulsory for all children. No institution can deny admission to a child with disability on account of his/her disability. The Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) focuses on enrolment, retention and achievement of all children.

Social inclusion is only happening in sections of the society. In the lower socio-economic strata, research studies have revealed that there is greater acceptance of persons with disabilities (PWD) with minimum expectations from them, whereas people from economically upper and affluent class of society have high expectations from PWD and for acceptance they do not move beyond denial (Bhan, S., Mehta, D. and Chhaproo, Y., et al., 1998). Gradually the efforts are being made by educating people through direct instruction and media to bring attitudinal changes in the society.

The educational institutions try out ***cognitive inclusion*** by allowing the children with special educational needs to study in general classrooms with non-disabled children. Cognitive inclusion is possible only if the subject matter is broken down into smaller learning units and teacher makes sure that all the children to the expected level of mastery learn each of the micro units of a lesson. Each child is given equal opportunity to learn, understand, retain and reproduce the information at an appropriate time and in appropriate manner.

How is Inclusion different from Integration?

In current times, the terms 'integration' and 'inclusion' are still confused and it

is necessary to differentiate between the two terms. Integration is described as "the process of moving children from special education settings into regular classrooms where they undertake most, if not all of their schooling" (Ashman and Elkins, 1998). With integration there is focus on helping students with disabilities fit in to the regular classrooms and that is why the emphasis is on teaching the normal curriculum (Carrington and Holm, 2005). In contrast, inclusion aims at empowering members in a school community to identify and dismantle actual and potential sources of exclusion that limit opportunities and outcomes for all students (Slee, 2003). Inclusive education is striving to achieve a way of life in schools where people are valued and treated with respect for their varied knowledge and experiences (Carrington, 1999; Carrington and Robinson, 2004; Moss, 2003).

In special school concept, the special education component is APART from the general education system, whereas in integrated approach, it is A PART of the general education. Inclusive education goes one step further. In this approach, the special education is an INTEGRAL PART of the general education system.

Inclusion
Special education is **an integral part** of the general education system.

Special School
Special education is **apart** from the general education system.

Integration
Special education is **a part** of the general education system.

General education system

Special education component
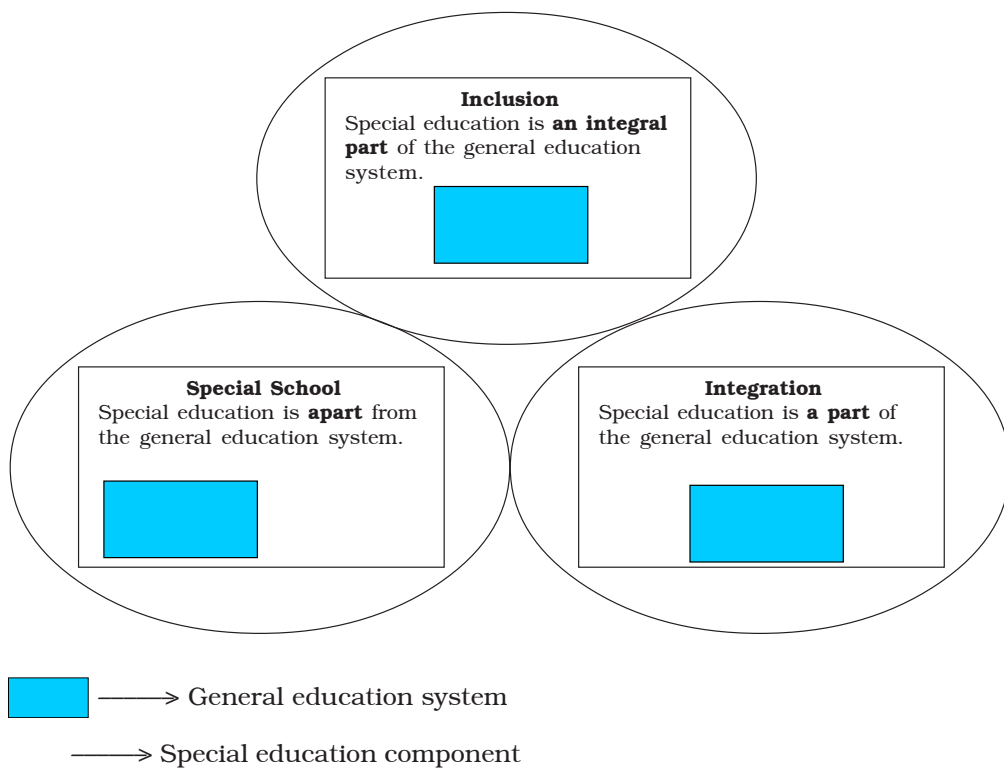
Therefore, the transition from "Special School Concept" to "Inclusive Education" can be treated as an evolutionary process in the services for children with disabilities.

Principles of Inclusion

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) articulated the underlying principles on which inclusive education is based. These are that:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education;
- Every child has unique characteristics, abilities, interests and learning needs;
- Education systems need to accommodate this diversity in student population;
- Those with special education needs must have access to regular schools;
- Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

Moreover, it is argued that inclusive schools provide an effective education for children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system (Gillies and Carrington, 2004).

Characteristics of Inclusive Education

The characteristics of inclusive education are as follows: -

- Acknowledges that all children can learn

- Acknowledges and respects differences in children: age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, HIV and TB status etc.
- Enables education structures, systems and methodologies to meet the needs of all   children
- Is part of a wider strategy to promote an inclusive society
- Is a dynamic process that is constantly evolving

What is the need for Inclusion in India?

In addressing the issue of "why inclusion", the reality in Indian context should be reviewed. Some of the important facts in the Indian scenario are as follows:

1. More than 90% of disabled children are found in the rural areas in India. The special schools as well as integrated education programmes are only a few in numbers and cannot serve all disabled children. Therefore, inclusive education is needed to provide equal educational opportunities to all disabled children in their own locations.

2. As far as the standardised models of integration are concerned, one specialist teacher serves 8 to 10 disabled children of the same category. This approach is not practical in rural areas. In most villages of the country, disabled children of different categories are present. Therefore, the disabled child has to depend on the general school for education. As a result, inclusion is inevitable for these children from rural areas.

3.   The extent of disability in each category ranges from mild to severe and profound cases. The mild and moderate cases are more in number than the severe and profound cases and they depend on the general education system. This calls for the involvement of general education so that the children who are currently left out of schools or those who are at risk can be served.

Therefore, the reality in India focuses the need for inclusive education. However, the general education system is yet to be fully sensitised to the educational needs of children with disabilities and therefore, the general system needs the assistance of specialist teachers for occasional help to make inclusive education work. With the inclusion of special education inputs in general teacher preparation, the pre-service teachers in the future are likely to be equipped with skills to teach children with disabilities too in addition to their general classroom teaching. Therefore, presence of a specialist teacher in the inclusive setting in Indian context would be vital for another decade.

Policy and Legislative Frameworks

In this section the main International and National level Policy frameworks and Legislations are explained that are relevant to education and to children with disabilities.

The Constitution of India (26 November, 1949) clearly states in the Preamble that everyone has the right to equality of status and of opportunity. The Article 41 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution supports the right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases including disablement. Further, Article 45 commits to the provision of free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. Based on this, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act 2002, has been enacted by the parliament making education a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years.

The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the **Programme of Action (1992)**, stress the need for integrating children with special needs with other groups. The objective to be achieved as stated in the NPE, 1986 is "to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence"

Integrated Education for the Disabled Children In the 1970s, the government launched the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of IEDC. The scheme aimed to provide educational opportunities to learners with disabilities in regular schools and to facilitate their achievement and retention. Under the scheme, hundred percent financial assistance is provided to for setting up resource centers, surveys and assessment of disabled children with disabilities, purchase and production of instruction materials and training and orientation of teachers.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) emerged as a result of deliberations held by more than 300 participants representing 92

governments including India and 25 International Organisations in June1994. For furthering the objectives of Education for all, it considered the fundamentalpolicy shifts required promoting inclusive education. It emphasises that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The term Special Educational Needs refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties. The Statement affirms: *"those with special educational needs must have access to regularschools, which should accommodate them within a child, centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs".*

The "**Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**" (1993) was an important resolution for improving the educational conditions of persons with disabilities. This had major implications for the Indian situation in the form of three legislative acts—**The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992** (RCI, 1992) **The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protections of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995** (PWD Act, 1995), and **The National Trust for Welfare of Persons with autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999.** While the RCI Act was solely concerned with manpower development for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, The National Trust Act aims to provide total care to persons with mental retardation and cerebral palsy and also manage the properties bequeathed to the Trust.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protections of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 stresses the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till they are 18 years old and further emphasise their right to measures like:

(a) Transport facilities to the students with disabilities or alternative financial incentives to parents or guardians to enable their students with disabilities toattend schools.

(b) The removal of architectural barriers from schools, colleges or other institutionsimparting vocational and professional training.

(c) The supply of books, uniforms and other materials to students with disabilities attending school

(d) The grant of scholarship to students with disabilities.

(e) Setting up of appropriate foray for the redressal of grievances of parents regarding the placement of their students with disabilities.

(f) Suitable modification in the examination system to eliminate purely mathematical questions for the benefit of blind students and students with low vision.

(g) Restructuring of curriculum for the benefit of students with disabilities.

(h) Restructuring the curriculum for benefit of students with hearing impairment to facilitate them to take only one language as part of their curriculum.

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) aims to provide Universal Elementary Education by the end of the plan. It also aims to provide basic education for the unreached segments and special groups. The special interventions and strategies like pedagogic improvement and adoption of child centered practices are focused on the groups like the girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, working children, children with disabilities, urban deprived children, children from minority groups, children below poverty line, migratory children and in the hardest to reach groups.

District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched to achieve the objective of education for all. The DPEP had a powerful impact on integrating disabled children. The scheme was initially launched in select clusters and blocks. It has now been expanded to more blocks and districts in the country. The advantage of this scheme is that it takes care of all areas from identification, assessment, enrolment and provision of appliances to total integration of disabled children in schools with resource support, teacher training and parental counselling. Many other schemes like Janshala, the joint programme of the Government of India and five U.N. agencies, have included the interventions of DPEP.

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* was launched to achieve the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education. This adopts a ZERO rejection policy and uses an approach of converging various schemes and programmes. It covers the following components under education for children with special needs:

- Early detection and identification
- Functional and formal assessment
- Educational Placement
- Aids and appliances
- Support services
- Teacher training
- Resource support
- Individual Educational Plan (IEP)
- Parental training and community mobilisation
- Planning and management
- Strengthening of special schools
- Removal of Architectural barriers
- Research
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Girls with disabilities

Role of Schools in Inclusive Education

Schools are being challenged to avoid traditional labels attached to specific groups (such as learning disabled, slow learner) or as Biklen (2000) observes, resist static understandings of categories and recognise that there is a wide diversity in the student population and there are different patterns of achievement and social contributions that fit the various cultural, ethnic and gender differences that students bring to schools. In formal terms, schools are being asked to move away from a deficit model where the problem essentially was located within the individual to a social model that recognises that disability is created through social institutions that have discriminatory and disabling practices (Mittler, 2000; Lindsay, 2003).

Schools are being challenged towards developing pedagogy of inclusion that Ainscow (1997) believes is "not about making marginal adjustments but rather

about asking fundamental questions concerning the way in which the organisation is currently structured". The aim is to transform mainstream schools in ways that will increase their capacities to respond to all learners and not just children with special education needs (Gillies and Carrington, 2004). It is really about creating and finding contexts that will enable children to experience success and feel competent (Biklen, 2000).

Schools have to be more flexible in the way they are organised so that teachers can work together in teams and in this way teachers can learn to construct the meaning of inclusion for themselves, learn to adopt new ways of teaching and interacting with students as a part of the overall transformation of their schools (Clark et al., 1999; Ainscow, 2000; Peters, 2002). An inclusive approach to schooling requires that "the perspective must be enlarged to all teachers, all policies, and all strategies for student assessment and so on" (Ferguson, 1998). By developing an inclusive pedagogy, teachers are able to connect individual learners and their own way of learning to the curriculum and the wider school community (Corbett, 2001).

Students too need to feel accepted and valued within their school. When they feel they are part of the school community, they are less likely to become alienated and are more likely to want to participate and be included (Finn, 1989). When teachers are willing to connect on a personal level with students who are potentially at risk of dropping out or becoming alienated, they can make a difference in reversing this trend and preventing student failure (Schlosser, 1992).

Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms

In any rural setting there may be just one or two teachers in a primary school. These teachers may find their work extremely challenging. To be a good teacher means reacting to the interests of different children and building teaching on what the children already know, which may sometimes prove to be difficult. As mentioned earlier, inclusion basically is an attitude of acceptance of diversities. For teaching in an inclusive classroom, a teacher needs to possess competencies that help him/her to plan and implement strategies that provide students wider access to regular curriculum. Research says that the teachers in an inclusive classroom should have the:

● Ability to problem-solve, to be able to informally assess the skills a student needs (Rather than relying solely on standardised curriculum).

● Ability to take advantage of children's individual interests and use their internal motivation for developing needed skills.

● Ability to set high but alternative expectations that are suitable for the students. This means developing alternative assessments.

● Ability to make appropriate expectations for each student, regardless of the student's capabilities. If teachers can do this, it allows all students to be included in a class and school.

- Ability to learn how to value all kinds of skills that students bring to a class, not just the academic skills. In doing this, teachers will make it explicit that in their classrooms they value all skills.

  Also the teachers must be able to:

- Recognise and respond to the diversity of students in their classrooms.
- Accommodate to students different learning styles and rates of learning by employing a range of teaching methods, including cooperative group.
- Learning, peer tutoring, team teaching and individualised instruction.
- Be aware of the rights of students with education support needs.
- Locate appropriate material, equipment or specialists.
- Identify and overcome barriers to learning.
- Consult with and develop partnerships with parents/ caregivers and colleagues.
- Use appropriate forms of assessment.
- Adapt their instruction to the prior knowledge and beliefs of students.
- Create an inclusive community that extends beyond the walls of the school.
- Seek to enhance the self-esteem of all students.

CONCLUSION

The equal importance of cognitive and procedural components to any professional development for inclusive education needs to be addressed for enduring change in the school and the classroom. Rethinking and planning for inclusive schooling often represents a substantial departure from teachers' prior experience, established beliefs and present practice. Indeed, 'they are encouraged to provide conditions of learning for children that the teachers themselves have rarely experienced' (Little 1993). Out of small number of studies conducted in the area of inclusive education only one thing emerges i.e. the beginning has been made but the researches are either at the awareness level or exploratory in nature. More specific, precise and scientific researches are needed to make inclusive education a reality in practice on a much larger scale. More teaching training modules need to be developed so that not only pre-service but also in-service teachers also could be trained in inclusive practices. The administrative and management aspects of inclusive education need to be studied at the micro and macro levels both in rural and urban settings so that the models thus developed could be replicated in varied situations. To conclude, including children with disabilities in education is a challenging task. It involves providing appropriate responses to wide spectrum of learning needs in both formal and non-formal settings.

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