

## BOOK REVIEW

### **School Without Walls— Inclusive Education for All**

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PUBLISHER

Heinemann Educational, Halley Court, Oxford

YEAR: 2002

PAGES: 200

*Schools Without Walls— Inclusive Education for All* by Madan Mohan Jha is an outcome of his efforts to delve into the scenario of inclusive education in historical and current perspectives. The context is relevant in developed countries, particularly United Kingdom, as well as in developing countries like India.

The author points out in his book that the concept of inclusive education is a confused and contested one. In richer and developed countries, education is already inclusive of girls, disadvantaged and all ethnic groups. Children with disabilities or having learning difficulties received special attention for inclusion into mainstream education unlike developing countries where a majority of children with special needs are excluded from mainstream education.

Inclusive education has now come to assume the connotation

of Education For All (EFA) which should mean the inclusion in education and the removal of educational disparity for all non literate adults and children. The most vulnerable children, those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, ethnic minorities, the disabled, destitute, child laborers, street children, orphans and the victims of war, violence and natural disasters, face the problem of equitable access to education. Hence, inclusive education is an issue of equity, ethics, human rights, social justice and of economic improvement. Author opines, in both developed and developing countries, inclusive education is a growing concept and an evolving practice; it is “a means not an end, a journey not a destination, a process not a product.”

The challenges of inclusive development in India are diverse and pressing. Inclusion means not only the inclusion of those with disability but also of the enormous number of socially and economically disadvantaged section belonging to diverse social, cultural and linguistic groups.

The book has 9 chapters beginning with an introduction, the 21st 'Century School' which traces the origin of the school as it exists today.

It has been argued that the institution of the present school was created to meet the needs of an industrial society in the nineteenth century. In the first chapter, an attempt has been made to find an answer to the question: Can the school of today meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and of the information age, and can it create an inclusive environment for all children to learn together? It raises the issues of effectiveness and equity. It presents certain features expected in the information age that can help address the issues arising out of concerns for rights, equity, diversity, excellence and inclusion. (Chapter two)

This chapter also deals with the educational thoughts of philosophers like Tomlinson, Illich, Deniels and Garner, Lipsky and Gartner about their vision on schools for the twenty first century in context of inclusive education. Chapter three, 'International Perspectives' is

devoted to the mapping of different perspectives and approaches to inclusive education at the international level. An attempt has also been made to present a brief picture on the status of inclusive education as it exists in developed countries.

Two separate chapters (four and five) give an account of the development of special education in Britain and India respectively. 'The British Scene' examines the development of special education in England and Wales, and how it has changed the policies and practices, given the background of inclusive education. The chapter holds relevance in Indian context, since there is a tendency to follow western models of inclusive education although the need and context may be different. In chapter five the author has described his experiences on his visits to schools in Oxfordshire and observations made in classrooms. It also presents models for practices for developing inclusive schools for children with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages. This chapter may be of special interest and great utility to Indian readers, particularly teachers, trainers and educational practitioners.

Further, in Chapter Six 'The Indian Context', historical perspectives on policy development on special and integrated education have been discussed in detail. Progress on education of the disabled and its status in respect of implementation of various projects

has also been presented. Since inclusion has been interpreted in the book as including all children in mainstream neighbourhood schools, the development of multi-track school systems, different schools for different categories of children has been critically examined and certain roadblocks identified. It has been mentioned that an appropriate approach to issues relating to language, textbooks, curriculum, teaching methodology and examinations could help in eliminating such roadblocks. The chapter also acknowledges the efforts of many voluntary agencies in building up innovative and inclusive pedagogy at the level of primary education. The strategies for inclusion, elaborately explained, are informative; however, the facilities with regard to infrastructure, teaching learning materials/equipments and teachers' preparedness need to be addressed to carry out these strategies. One important highlight of chapter six, which is, provision of one-to-one support of a student with hearing loss placed in a mainstream school, is one of the significant classroom strategies, and holds special significance in Indian context as well, as this kind of intervention can aid special children in learning to a great extent in inclusive set up.

Chapter seven is devoted to inclusive practices in classroom. There is limited literature on the pedagogy of inclusion. Since the practice follows policy and a robust

policy of inclusion is yet to be developed, there is not much on what can be recommended as inclusive teaching methodologies. It is always more than that and children in a classroom may belong to different age groups and grades. An attempt has been made to find out if some British teaching strategies could be adopted to address these issues in the Indian situation.

'Making it Happen', takes note of inclusion in practice recommended in some of the contemporary literature from Australia, America and Britain. It also presents a set of advisories that could be considered by a school, or a school system, for making schools more inclusive. While some policy adjustments may facilitate the process, it has been argued that schools need not wait, they can develop an inclusion plan and inclusion pedagogy that would benefit all children and the school system on the whole.

The last chapter, 'In Conclusion', sums up the answers to questions researched and opines that the inclusion process may be started by teachers and schools even without waiting for debate on the subject to conclude and desired policy to change, since the existing Indian policy framework provides for such an initiative.

As outlined above the author has covered a large spectrum regarding Inclusive Education for All in his book 'School Without Walls' historically, internationally including the scenario

in India, which is appreciable. After reading the book, the reviewer is of the opinion that the concept of inclusive education in this book has been dealt in a way which has much deeper connotation, than Inclusive Education is being perceived in Indian education system. Presently under RTE Act, 2009 minimum 25 per cent admission has been mandatory for the children from weaker section of the society, ST, SC, OBC, Minorities and other disadvantaged (socially, economically) community in un-aided and private schools including CWSN at the entry level. Children under such categories happened to be an integral part of inclusive education. There is a felt need that learning gaps of such children should be addressed in a focused manner for their educational developments in inclusive set up.

All aspects of Inclusive Education have been dealt in depth which would facilitate stakeholders at all levels, particularly teacher educators and teachers who are involved in the educational development of CWSN. Often it is debated whether children with disability should access the same curriculum as available to non-disabled children or should it be modified, curtailed or adapted for disabled children? To which the author has quoted Kugelmass, J.W. (1996) (Reconstructing Curriculum for Systemic Inclusion) Berres, M.S.,

Ferguson, D.L. Knoblock, P. and Woods, C. (eds.) *Creating Tomorrow's School Today: Stories of Renewal, Change, and Renewal*. New York: Teacher College Press, p.136) where three assumptions in this regard have been mentioned, that operate in the traditional school system, which are significant and the learning points for teachers, trainers, educators and curriculum designers. In this context the author has explained on what could be the effective curriculum by quoting Rose (1998:138) in the book, which happens to be very relevant in today's context of inclusive education under RTE Act. It is stated, 'effective curriculum will be the one, which not only allows for the differences, but which also enables pupil to reach his or her potential through a process of collaborative learning, within a school which celebrates the whole range of its pupils' needs. Schools, which endeavour to create a suitable climate for inclusion, will need to achieve a curriculum balance, Rose, R. 1988 (*The Curriculum: A Vehicle for Inclusion or a Lever for Exclusion?*) in Tilstone, C., Florian, L. and Rose. R. (eds.) *Promoting Inclusive Practice*. London: Routledge).

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