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INCLUSION IN INDIA: IDENTIFYING THREATS IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

Inclusive education is considered as the need of the hour. In order to provide equal opportunity in education to students with disability this is the only way forward. India also continues its efforts to implement inclusive education and provide equal accessibility of its population of students with special needs. This article is intended to look into the difficulties in practicing inclusion and raise questions towards the existing support system. It also to deliberately try to raises questions in readers mind about the possible solutions.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Students with Special Need, Inclusive Practices*

When we look into the history of inclusive education we understand that "normalisation" principle is the philosophy behind it. This philosophy has originated from Scandinavian countries- especially Denmark and Sweden played a major role. This principle first propounded by Wolf Wolfensberger from Denmark. He states that normalisation is the utilization of culturally valued means in order to establish and maintain personal behaviour, experiences and characteristics that are culturally normative or valued.

This is one term which is occasionally misinterpreted. This term does not mean that 'making' persons with disability 'normal'. It means that accepting person as it is and providing equal opportunity to participate and live in the society as equal members. There conditions of life need to be normalised. It is intended to provide persons with disabilities in that country equal status. Normalisation means providing persons with disabilities equal accessibility in education, employment, recreation and social life. In order to implement normalisation principle ways followed are mainstreaming / integration and inclusion.

International league of Societies for Mentally Handicapped (1999) states that inclusion refers to the opportunity for persons with disability to participate fully in all the educational, employment, recreational, community and domestic activities that typify every society. From this it is clear that inclusion is a term which is not only applicable in education but it has applicability in all aspects of a person's life. To achieve the objective of inclusive society we need to provide equal opportunity to persons with disability in education, employment- provide equal chance to get a job, recreational- provide access to people with disabilities to various recreational facilities in the society like parks, theatres/cinema halls, play grounds etc, community and domestic activity- provide equal participation to persons with disability in different community and domestic activities.

At present developing countries like India give its major chunk of resources and attention in implementation inclusion in education. Reason for the same is the realisation that through education we can bring persons with disabilities into the mainstream of the society and this education will facilitate further inclusion in other areas of life. The concept of inclusive education has come to mean many things: from the very specific – for example, the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools - to a very broad notion of social inclusion as used by governments and the international community as a way of responding to diversity among learners (Ainscow, 2007). This article is also focus on inclusive education, but unlike other article this will focus on inclusion as a practice and rise questions on the inclusive practices in education.

Right to Education Act passed in 2009 play a major role in the implementation of inclusive education in India. Because the act made education as fundamental right for every child in the age group of 6-14 years, which include children with disabilities as well. This act will assure a place for children with special needs in schools. But schools should not only provide right to education (access) but also should focus on right in education (equity). Simply by guaranteeing a place in school equity in education cannot be achieved. For that we have to provide appropriate education based on the needs of every child. Below discussed are some of the points which affect inclusive practices in India.

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Infrastructure and other resources

In countries like India factor which negatively affects the implementation of inclusive practices is lack of infrastructural resources. It is well known fact that Government schools in India face severe crunch in finance which is necessary for infrastructure development. Only government school is accessible for the rural middle class and rural and urban lower class. So it is essential to strengthen these schools for inclusion. Presently efforts are made through Sarva Siksha Abhyan (SSA) to improve the condition of government schools in India. But the question remains is that how effective its implementation and by when can we expect our schools to be ready? Schools should start admitting students with special needs from the neighbourhood instead of waiting for the infrastructure to be ready completely.

Attitude of the society

Negative attitude is one of the major barriers for the implementation of inclusive education. This includes the attitude of parents of children without disability and with disability, and teachers in the regular education system. These negative attitudes usually arise from the lack of knowledge or awareness regarding inclusive education and special needs. Many parents of children without disabilities do not agree with the idea that their children studies with children with disabilities. They may have belief like disability is communicable, or their child may learn from negative models. If the teacher do not have belief in the individual differences and in the concept that children with disability can also be educated they may act as hindrances. It is also imperative to develop a right attitude among students without disabilities towards inclusion. Reason for the same is that they are one of the major stake holders of inclusion. Peers should be trained to accept the differences between peers.

A successful inclusive programme essentially needs to be a community based programme. Participation of the different members in the community is important for the success of this programme so members in the community should have right attitude towards people with disability and their education.

Individual difference in the classroom

For the success of inclusive education an 'acceptance' of differences between students as ordinary aspect of human development is more important. Every teacher should believe in the fact that it is okay to have different abilities among learners. Inclusion actually does not mean to neglect the educational differences between students but it ask to respond to those different needs in ways that include, that is in regular class room, instead of excluding them.

To deal with these differences in an inclusive classroom a teacher should have sufficient knowledge in teaching strategies. Early work in intervention was focused on process training model. That is, focus was on underlying abilities involved in the learning process. Methods like diagnostic prescriptive teaching were focused on ability training rather than focusing on skill training. These methods could not deliver as much they promised. So the focus has been shifted to methods which focus on skill training. Teaching strategies, which are based on what is to be learned rather than what is wrong with learner, gained importance and skill training model got more attention. The most important thing is that to make objectives and content made more accessible to learners. Researches to examine interventions by type of impairment have made it hard to see that similar strategies are often recommended for teaching different 'types' of learners.

Teacher knowledge

Generally it is called as an important factor which hinders the implementation inclusive education in our country. But efforts to find out what type of knowledge they should have are meagre. Study by Florian (1998) suggested that teachers need knowledge about learning difficulties and that they need to be skilled in using specific instructional strategies. There are evidences which show that the strategies used with children without special needs can be used with adaptations among children with special needs. At the same there are studies which shows that teaching practices that are effective for students with special needs also work with students without special needs.

When learners encounter difficulty teachers need to work out a strategy to support learner. Whenever regular classroom teacher consult a specialist it is to support the teacher's effort to ensure that learner is

meaningfully engage in the classroom activities. Inclusion does not mean that teachers and other staff in the school are left on their own without support.

Professional training received by teachers play a major role in implementation of inclusive education. In India presently professional training programme like B. Ed do not have significant content of special needs education as a compulsory subject. There are universities which offer it as an optional elective. But that is not enough to prepare teachers for inclusion, for that you may need to provide more in-depth knowledge regarding various special needs and strategies or adaptations in strategies which can be used to deal with special educational need in a regular class room. We should not neglect the attempts made by the government to promote awareness regarding special educational needs of students through in-service programmes conducted through SCERT's. But the big question is that how effective they were in reaching its objective?

Teacher Preparation

Rouse (2008) has suggested that the challenge of professional development might be expressed as a reciprocal triangular relationship between three elements, as shown in figure 1.
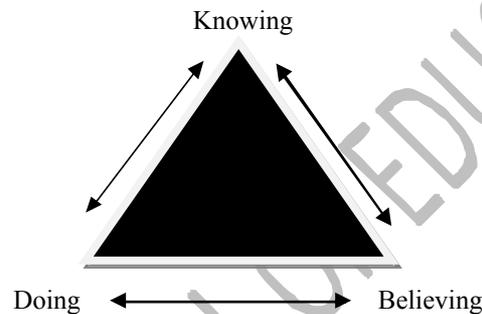

Figure 1. Knowing, Believing and Doing

In this model, any two of the three elements of knowing, believing, and doing are thought to influence the third. This means, if a teacher believes in the philosophy of inclusion and is willing to try it out by including learners who might otherwise have been excluded, then teachers knowledge about inclusive practice will develop. Likewise another teacher who believes in inclusion and do not have the confidence to try it, if he/she take a course in inclusion that will improve his/her knowledge and further develop the confidence to engage in it. Other teachers who know about inclusive practices, but not so sure about she believe in it or not, but by working in a school that has an inclusive ethos ('doing'), they come to see the practice can be effective. So it is not necessary to wait for all three elements to be in a teacher to implement inclusion. Teachers will be in different places in terms of their knowledge, beliefs and practices. Here the important question to agencies is that how teachers can be supported to develop their beliefs, knowledge and practices that support inclusion.

To facilitate inclusion it is very important to discard the concept of 'normalcy' and bring changes in thinking and practices. 'normalcy' concept promote the thinking that persons with disabilities and learning difficulties are different from so called normal or they are abnormal. This is an attitude which only develops sympathy and plays a negative role in inclusion. Inclusion required belief in right of each student to get education instead sympathy. For that you need to develop a thought that individual differences are part of human being.

Here a discussion by Florian (2008) is significant to quote:

"......a more rounded appreciation of how to deliver inclusive practice' begins with an understanding that inclusive practice is more than differentiation. It involves an understanding of the interactive socio-cultural factors that interact to produce individual differences 9biology, culture, family, school), rather than explanations that stress single cause. Inclusive practice involves understanding how to sort out the relative contribution of these factors in determining appropriate responses when children experience difficulty. Moreover, it involves an understanding that not all children will experience difficulty despite being affected by such socio-cultural factors. Teachers can make a difference. ...

Teachers need to learn new strategies for working in inclusion. Teacher training should ensure that teachers have greater awareness and understanding of educational and social causes which can affect students learning and should develop strategies which can be used to deal with difficulties of students with special needs in regular classrooms.

Teachers are well placed in Indian schools, at least in government schools up to eighth class were non-detention policy is being implemented, to change the way they work in the classroom. They are free to think differently and respond differently to the needs of students with special needs. So they should encourage the inclusion of students with special educational needs and take up this challenge.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is the need of the hour. Countries like India where majority population of persons with disability stays in rural area and maximum services for persons with disability are in urban area. Educating children with disability in neighbourhood schools is the only option to achieve 'education for all'.

This article discussed about hindrances of inclusive practices in India. In order to improve inclusive practices in our country we need to work on improving infrastructural resources, and creating positive attitude among members in the society. When we look into the class room practices it is important to understand individual differences as a part of human development. Also it is essential to improve the knowledge of teachers in specific teaching strategies or adapting general teaching strategies to suit to the specific needs of children. Knowing, doing and believing are the three elements of challenges in professional development. Teachers will be in different places in terms of their knowledge, beliefs and practices.

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