

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A CHALLENGE BEFORE US

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### ABSTRACT

Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children. Recommendations to send children with disabilities to mainstream schools were first made in the Sargent Report in 1944, and again in 1964 by the Kothari Commission (Julka, 2005). Despite this, the change has been slow, with segregation in special schools dominating the scene until recently. There is no need of reinforcing the fact that teacher education remains a very weak link with respect to equipping teachers to be prepared for an inclusive classroom environment. The teacher education diplomas and degrees offer “Education of children with special needs” as an optional subject, in order to prepare teachers to identify and diagnose disability. However it gives them a holistic perspective with respect to dealing with diversity or challenge negative attitudes. The challenges and prospects in India are elucidated in the present paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Education, Teacher, Classroom Environment

### INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighborhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together.



Figure 1

Inclusive education happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, good things happen. For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that special education meant separate education. But we now know that when children are educated together, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved. We also know that simply

placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.

## MEANING AND DEFINITION

**Inclusion** in education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-special needs students. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or a classroom to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. Implementation of these practices varies. Schools most frequently use the inclusion model for selected students with mild to moderate special needs. Fully inclusive schools, which are rare, do not separate "general education" and "special education" programs; instead, the school is restructured so that all students learn together.

Inclusive education differs from the 'integration' or 'mainstreaming' model of education, which tended to be concerned principally with disability and special educational needs, and learners changing or becoming 'ready for' or deserving of accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child.

As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child. Emphasizing inclusive education does not rule out special schools or Centre's. They would still be required to cater to children with profound and complex difficulties in need of more specialized and extensive help, including e.g. many deaf children. This alternative should, however, not be considered, unless classroom placement cannot meet their needs.

In line with the new policy of inclusive education, special schools begin to function more and more as resource Centre's. They involve in outreach programmes, where they draw on their vast experience and knowledge. They link their activities with those of the regular schools, the families, and the communities. Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. This circumstance is of vital importance to their personal development. Interrupting a disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself.

In this context, it is important to stress the role parents have. They have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.

As a rule, there are a number of practical problems that have to be solved before a child with special educational needs can go to school or take part in school activities. The arrangements it takes are fairly simple, provided co-ordinated local and unconventional initiatives are stimulated. One should also remember that the child's schoolmates represent a valuable potential partner who is ready and able to help in overcoming some of these problems.

**Table 1: School Reform Needed Which Facilitating Learning of Every Child**

Traditional Approach	Inclusive Approach
Education for some	Education for all
Static	Flexible
Collective teaching	Individualized Teaching
Learning in segregated areas	Learning in Integrated areas
Emphasis on teaching subject-orientated	Emphasis on learning child-centered
Diagnostic / prescriptive	Holistic
Opportunities limited by exclusion	Equalization of opportunities for all
Disability view	Curricular view
Labels children disability wise	Planning is made on ability levels and opposes all kinds of labeling

A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Feeling included is not limited to physical and cognitive disabilities, but also includes the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and of other forms of human differences.

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett wrote, "Student performance and behavior in educational tasks can be profoundly affected by the way we feel, we are seen and judged by others. When we expect to be viewed as inferior, our abilities seem to diminish".

**HOW INCLUSION IS DIFFERENT FROM INTEGRATION AND MAINSTREAMING**

Inclusion has different historical roots which may be integration of students with severe disabilities in the US (who may previously been excluded from schools or even lived in institutions)<sup>[5]</sup> or an inclusion model from Canada and the US (e.g., Syracuse University, New York) which is very popular with inclusion teachers who believe in participatory learning, cooperative learning, and inclusive classrooms.

Inclusive education differs from the early university professor's work (e.g., 1970s, Education Professor Carol Berrigan of Syracuse University, 1985; Douglas Biklen, Dean of School of Education through 2011) in *integration/integration* and *mainstreaming* which were taught throughout the world including in international seminars in Italy. Mainstreaming (e.g., the Human Policy Press poster; If you thought the wheel was a good idea, you'll like the ramp) tended to be concerned about "readiness" of all parties for the new coming together of students with significant needs. Thus, integration and mainstreaming principally was concerned about disability and 'special educational needs' (since the children were not in the regular schools) and involved teachers, students, principals, administrators, School Boards, and parents changing and becoming 'ready for' students who needed accommodation or new methods of curriculum and instruction by the mainstream.

By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child returning to the US Supreme Court's *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision and the new Individuals with Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act (IDEIA). Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms, which remain popular among large multi-service providers, to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities.

## INDIAN SCENARIO OF EDUCATION FOR DISABLED

Education of children with disabilities in India, as all over the world, has moved from segregation, special schools to integrated education. There is a national level central government sponsored scheme called Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC). This project was started in 1980s and designed based on the experience gathered from a UNICEF assisted pilot project called PIED (project on integrated education of disabled children).

In the mid-1980s many NGOs implemented this IEDC with grants from government. of India. This project is implemented by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

This is basically an itinerant resource teaching approach and one resource teacher was given to every 8 children with special needs. There are around 60,000 children with disabilities getting access to education under this scheme. By and large the project is managed by the NGO sector.

Although the goals and objectives of the IEDC program were laudable, the number of children with disabilities enrolled was woefully small. For example in Karnataka states about 2% of all children with disabilities acquire education. About 1% of these children are enrolled in special schools and the balances 1% are in the integrated education system.

**Table 2**

Total	Special Education		Integrated Education	
Number of children with disabilities who need education: Location: Karnataka Age: 0-14 Yrs Source: Karnataka Door to door survey report-1991	Number of children receiving education in special schools/ institutions (Number of Special Schools: 120)		Number of children receiving education in integrated schools (Number of Integrated Schools: 2384)	
<b>137044</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>7.30%</b>	<b>9462</b>	<b>6.90%</b>
	Total Grants received Rs. 4 crores (approx.) (1 crore: Karnataka Govt.3 crores: Govt. of India)		Total Grants received Rs 1,15,00,000	
<b>Cost per child</b>	<b>Rs 4000</b>		<b>Rs 1215</b>	

### Why we Need to Move from IEDC?

- IEDC was heavily dependent on resource teachers in the projects implemented by NGOs.

- IEDC implemented by Government teachers had a questionable quality because the teachers were trained only for 42 days.
- In the NGO implemented IED model the quality and support to children in rural areas was inadequate because the resource teachers had to travel from one village to the other, often covering long distances on foot. The time actually available for resource teaching was inadequate.
- The resource teaching approach in NGO models was also questionable because children were either pulled out from regular classes for resource teaching or they were asked to come before school and stay back after school. This was not a child friendly approach, more so for children in the 4th standard and above, who travelled a long distance, often from neighboring villages, to reach the school.

### **PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSION AND NECESSARY RESOURCES**

Although once hailed, usually by its opponents, as a way to increase achievement while decreasing costs, full inclusion does not save money, but is more cost-beneficial and cost-effective. It is not designed to reduce students' needs, and its first priority may not even be to improve academic outcomes; in most cases, it merely moves the special education professionals (now dual certified for all students in some states) out of "their own special education" classrooms and into a corner of the general classroom or as otherwise designed by the "teacher-in-charge" and "administrator-in-charge". To avoid harm to the academic education of students with disabilities, a full panoply of services and resources is required (of education for itself), including

- Adequate supports and services for the student
- Well-designed individualized education programs
- Professional development for all teachers involved, general and special educators alike
- Time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students together
- Reduced class size based on the severity of the student needs
- Professional skill development in the areas of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, adaptive curriculum
- Collaboration between parents or guardians, teachers or para educators, specialists, administration, and outside agencies.
- Sufficient funding so that schools will be able to develop programs for students based on student need instead of the availability of funding.

Indeed, the students with special needs do receive funds from the federal government, by law originally the Educational for All Handicapped Children Act of 1974 to the present day, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, which requires its use in the most integrated setting.

In principle, several factors can determine the success of inclusive classrooms:

- Family-school partnerships

- Collaboration between general and special educators
- Well-constructed plans that identify specific accommodations, modifications, and goals for each student
- Coordinated planning and communication between "general" and "special needs" staff
- Integrated service delivery
- Ongoing training and staff development
- Leadership of teachers and administrators.

## COMMON PRACTICES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Teachers often nurture a relationship between a student with special needs and a same-age student without a special educational need. Another common practice is the assignment of a **buddy** to accompany a student with special needs at all times (for example in the cafeteria, on the playground, on the bus and so on). This is used to show students that a diverse group of people make up a community, that no one type of student is better than another, and to remove any barriers to a friendship that may occur if a student is viewed as "helpless." Such practices reduce the chance for elitism among students in later grades and encourage cooperation among groups.

Teachers use a number of techniques to help build classroom communities:

- Using games designed to build community
- Involving students in solving problems
- Sharing songs and books that teach community
- Openly dealing with individual differences by discussion
- Assigning classroom jobs that build community
- Teaching students to look for ways to help each other
- Utilizing physical therapy equipment such as standing frames, so students who typically use wheelchairs can stand when the other students are standing and more actively participate in activities
- Encouraging students to take the role of teacher and deliver instruction (e.g. read a portion of a book to a student with severe disabilities)
- Focusing on the strength of a student with special needs
- Create classroom checklists
- Take breaks when necessary
- Create an area for children to calm down
- Organize student desk in groups

- Create a self and welcoming environment
- Set ground rules and stick with them
- Help establish short-term goals
- Design a multi-faced curriculum
- Communicate regular with parents and/or caregivers
- Seek support from other special education teachers.

## **BENEFITS OF INCLUSION IN REGULAR CLASSROOM**

There are many positive effects of inclusions where both the students with special needs along with the other students in the classroom both benefit. Research has shown positive effects for children with disabilities in areas such as reaching individualized education program (IEP) goal, improving communication and social skills, increasing positive peer interactions, many educational outcomes, and post school adjustments. Positive effects on children without disabilities include the development of positive attitudes and perceptions of persons with disabilities and the enhancement of social status with non-disabled peers.

### **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.

### **Social Advantages**

One of the most obvious advantages of inclusion is the fact that students with disabilities can be integrated

socially with their peers. They can create long-lasting friendships that would not be otherwise possible, and these friendships can give them the skills to navigate social relationships later on in life. Their peers can act as role models for social skills through their interactions with each other, whereas in a homogeneous classroom, their only role models would be students with disabilities who may lack the same social skills that they do.

### **Academic Benefits**

Students with disabilities can also benefit academically in an inclusion setting. Of all of the benefits of inclusion, this one is perhaps most astounding. Many teachers and parents wonder whether students with disabilities would fare better academically in a classroom that was geared specifically towards them.

### **CRITICISMS OF INCLUSION PROGRAMMES**

Critics of full and partial inclusion include educators, administrators and parents. Full and partial inclusion approaches neglect to acknowledge the fact most students with significant special needs require individualized instruction or highly controlled environments. Thus, general education classroom teachers often are teaching a curriculum while the special education teacher is remediating instruction at the same time. Similarly, a child with serious inattention problems may be unable to focus in a classroom that contains twenty or more active children. Although with the increase of incidence of disabilities in the student population, this is a circumstance all teachers must contend with, and is not a direct result of inclusion as a concept.

- Full inclusion may be a way for schools to placate parents and the general public, using the word as a phrase to garner attention for what are in fact illusive efforts to educate students with special needs in the general education environment.
- At least one study examined the lack of individualized services provided for students with IEPs when placed in an inclusive rather than mainstreamed environment.
- Some researchers have maintained school districts neglect to prepare general education staff for students with special needs, thus preventing any achievement. Moreover, school districts often expound an inclusive philosophy for political reasons, and do away with any valuable pull-out services, all on behalf of the students who have no say in the matter.
- Inclusion is viewed by some as a practice philosophically attractive yet impractical. Studies have not corroborated the proposed advantages of full or partial inclusion. Moreover, "push in" servicing does not allow students with moderate to severe disabilities individualized instruction in a resource room, from which many show considerable benefit in both learning and emotional development.
- Parents of disabled students may be cautious about placing their children in an inclusion program because of fears that the children will be ridiculed by other students, or be unable to develop regular life skills in an academic classroom.

Some argue that inclusive schools are not a cost-effective response when compared to cheaper or more effective interventions, such as special education. They argue that special education helps "fix" the special needs students by

providing individualized and personalized instruction to meet their unique needs. This is to help students with special needs adjust as quickly as possible to the mainstream of the school and community. Proponents counter that students with special needs are not fully into the mainstream of student life because they are secluded to special education. Some argue that isolating students with special needs may lower their self-esteem and may reduce their ability to deal with other people. In keeping these students in separate classrooms they aren't going to see the struggles and achievements that they can make together. However, at least one study indicated mainstreaming in education has long-term benefits for students as indicated by increased test scores, where the benefit of inclusion has not yet been proved.

## CONCLUSIONS

Inclusive education must respond to all pupils as individuals, recognizing individuality as something to be appreciated and respected. Inclusive education responding to special needs will thus have positive returns for all pupils." All children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to a certain type of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all its children."

That is a big and difficult task, but "where there is a will there is a way!"

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