



## **INCLUSION IN EDUCATION AND THE TEACHER'S POSITION**

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### ***Abstract***

*With the world going global today, has led to growth in diversity of the student population in all parts of the world. This subject is highly deliberated upon with great concern and fervor. As per the biologists and the psychologists, no two individuals are born alike. They are born with their individual differences. But heredity and environment play a mighty role in shaping their lives. These differences among students may include the language, culture, religion, gender, varied abilities, sexual preference, socioeconomic status, geographical setting, etc. They may be gifted, exceptional, talented, slow learners, learning disabled and the like. The differences are often looked upon as a problem or a handicap rather than an opportunity for getting acquainted with different lives. How these students can be included, valued, respected, and greeted in this naturally assorted world. The only rejoinder is inclusion through inclusive education. Inclusive education is a combination of values and didactic practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. To make this possible the teacher's role is of prime importance. This paper is an effort to ponder upon the position of the teacher in handling diversity by understanding the notion of inclusion.*

**Key Words:** *Diversity; Inclusion; Inclusive Education; Education for All; Special Educator; General Educator.*

**Introduction:** Inclusion in education is the right of every child, in spite of all its nuances. United Nations instruments on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities, the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (India is a signatory to all) state that: "... Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions." (Article 3, Salamanca Framework for Action). "Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all;

moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system." (Article 2, Salamanca Statement).

This framework stems from the messages of the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and was reaffirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000): "... In order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly... Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners...".

Keeping abreast to this thought, Rule 6 of the UN Standard Rules for Persons with Disabilities states that 'States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. General education authorities are responsible for the education of persons with disabilities in integrated settings. Education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organization.' The Indian 'Equal Opportunities and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act' 1995, rule 26, speaks about the 'education of children with disabilities up to the age of 18 years in an appropriate environment'.

The value of diversity has been viewed by Grant Wiggins (1992) where he stated that, "We will not successfully restructure schools to be effective until we stop seeing diversity in students *as a problem*. Our challenge is not one of getting "special" students to better adjust to the usual schoolwork, the usual teacher pace, or the usual tests. The challenge of schooling remains what it has been since the modern era began two centuries ago: ensuring that *all* students receive their entitlement. They have the *right* to thought-provoking and enabling schoolwork, so that they might use their minds well and discover the joy therein to willingly push themselves farther. They have the *right* to instruction that obligates the teacher, like the doctor, to change tactics when progress fails to occur. They have the *right* to assessment that provides students and teachers with insight into real-world standards, useable feedback, the opportunity to self-assess, and the chance to have dialogue with, or even to challenge, the assessor—also a *right* in a democratic culture. Until such a time, we will have no insight into human potential. Until the

challenge is met, schools will continue to reward the lucky or the already-equipped and weed out the poor performers.”

Hence, the concept of inclusive education has developed towards the idea that all children and young people, despite different cultural, social and learning backgrounds, should have equivalent learning opportunities in all kinds of schools. The focus is on generating inclusive settings, meaning thereby: respecting, understanding and taking care of cultural, social and individual diversity; provision of equal access to quality education; and close co-ordination with other social policies.

**Inclusive Education:** Inclusive education is defined as a strategy of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion within and from education. It promotes the process of including children with special needs (who are disabled or otherwise disadvantaged) into the regular education system where they should join their school-age peers in a learning process that is most conducive to their needs. It is a process of strengthening the capacity of an education system to reach out to all learners. It is, therefore, an overall principle that should guide all educational policies and practices, starting from the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society. This rights-based philosophy is outlined in international declarations, conventions and reports relevant to inclusive education. In order to realise this right, the international Education for All (EFA) movement has worked to make quality basic education available to all learners.

What really is Inclusive Education? The answer to it would be that inclusive education provides: Equal membership to all students; Shared ownership of all students; Necessary supports for all students; Positive and rich learning environment for all students; Expectations for all students to learn. As an education system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its code 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 students the extensive feasible access to the standard curriculum. While providing these facilities priority should always be what is best for the particular child.

In our move towards providing inclusive education, we cannot rule out the need for special schools, which still would be required to cater to children with profound and complex intricacies, where more specialized and extensive assistance is binding. This option should only be considered where a normal classroom set-up cannot meet their compound needs.

Inclusive education allows children with multiple disabilities to stay with their family and also to go to the nearest school, just like all the other children. This set-up influences their personal growth and development, as interrupting a disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself. In fact, the parents have a very vital role to play in inclusive education. They have a right to be involved in taking all decisions pertaining to their child. They should be seen as partners in the education process. Wherever such type of co-operation exists, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers as well as the schools.

**Legal Definition of Inclusive Education:** The United States Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, now named as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2002 states that “--to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including those children in public and private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.--“. As a result, this legal directive has been a leading force in the design and implementation of inclusive education.

Since the dissemination of IDEA (P.L. 94-142) the federal court decisions clarified that:

- School districts must consider placement in general education for all students with disabilities, regardless of the degree of the disability.
- Academic and social benefits of placement in general education must be taken into consideration.
- Such consideration must be more than a token gesture.
- Placing students with disabilities in general education settings with the necessary supports, services, and supplementary aids.

It has been witnessed that denying inclusive education to a student with disabilities is very high. By this act coming into force, lots of changes were observed the world over.

The Central Board of Secondary Education have issued Guidelines of Inclusive Education of Children with Disabilities (IECD) (2009) which state that each school is advised:

1. To ensure that no child with special needs is denied admission in Mainstream Education
2. To monitor the enrollment in schools of disabled children

3. To provide support through assistive devices and the availability of trained teachers
4. To modify the existing physical infrastructure and teaching methodologies to meet the needs of all children including Children with Special Needs
5. To ensure that 3% reservation of persons with disabilities is done in all institutions receiving funds from Government (Under The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995)
6. To ensure that all schools are made disabled friendly by 2020 and all educational institutions including hostels, libraries, laboratories and buildings will have barrier free access for the disabled
7. To ensure availability of Study material for the disabled and Talking Text Books, Reading Machines and computers with speech software
8. To ensure an adequate number of sign language interpreters, transcription services and a loop induction system will be introduced for the hearing handicapped students
9. To revisit classroom organization required for the education of Children with Special Needs
10. To ensure regular in-service training of teachers in inclusive schools.

### **What are Inclusive schools?**

Inclusive schools embrace diversity; provide access to knowledge, skills, and information to all students. These schools provide tailored learning to meet the individual needs. They encourage co-teaching and collaboration among general teachers and special educators; collaborate with families and community members; think outside the box in terms of school structure and finance; maintain high expectations of all students; engage in continuous improvement; promote and support inclusive communities. This would require restructuring the regular school system for establishing meaningful educational standards/ student outcomes. As a result it would hold schools responsible for achieving the desired outcomes with every student. This requires great individual and collective commitment and effort on the part of the administrators, teachers, parents and community as a whole. All restructuring efforts in schools are based on a system of values and beliefs centered on and around the best interests of the student. This will help in promoting social cohesion, belonging, and active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities at large. The belief is that:

- Each student can and will learn and succeed.

- Diversity enriches us all, and students at risk can overcome the risk for failure through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners.
- Each student has unique contributions to offer to other learners.
- Each student has strengths and needs.
- Services and supports should not be downgraded to one setting (e.g., special classes or schools).
- Effective learning results from the collaborative efforts of everyone working to ensure each student's success.

### **What makes Inclusion Work?**

Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value and embrace diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of its members. It is carried out through a range of public, community programs, and services available to all students. These are only possible through:

- Support from the principal and other administrators.
- A school vision that values diversity.
- A plan for inclusion that allows for continuous improvement.
- Collaborative educational teams that include parents as partners.
- Flexible approaches to teaching and learning.
- A variety of instructional methods for different kinds of learners.
- Curriculum and assessment which are adapted to meet the individual student needs.
- Ongoing learning opportunities about inclusion for families and staff.

By following this strategy, Inclusive education will be successful in achieving its goals, wherein all children will have a sense of belongingness. Children will develop their natural support systems. They will display more appropriate behaviours. Children will develop true friendships among their peers. Inclusive education provides incidental benefit for all the children. It benefits the students with disabilities and students without disabilities by augmenting their learning.

It is even beneficial for the parents also. They also get a greater sense of belongingness. They have fewer schools to attend to. Friendships among the parents increase. Inclusive education generates hope and long term expectations of parents for their children. Even for teachers also inclusive education provides them with opportunities for extending more help to all types of students. It helps them in improving their planning skills as well as in increasing their ability to

individualize lessons. The most wonderful benefit is inclusive education which brings special education teachers and general education teachers together where they to share their expertise.

### **How Do We Make Inclusive Education Work?**

Most importantly what is to remember is *No one in this is alone*. We are a *Team*, and together we will support one another and do whatever we can to educate *All* children.

Role of the General Education Teacher:

- Treat students with disabilities as an equal class member
- Role model appropriate behaviours towards students with disabilities
- Avoid juvenile language
- Ignore student's (minor) inappropriate behaviours
- Avoid seating students with disabilities in the back of the class by the door.
- Expect the child with disabilities to participate
- Assign the child with disabilities to a cooperative learning group/labs
- Encourage students to help one another
- Ensure Flexibility

Role of the Special Education Teacher:

- Help everyone have a positive view of students with disabilities
- Teach All students, co-planning
- Make modifications to the curriculum
- Explain accommodation
- Orchestrate and supervise supports and services for the children with disabilities
- Train paraprofessionals
- Collaborate with everyone, especially the family
- Collect data and use it to modify the individual child's educational program

A million dollar question arises 'How do we Work together?' It has been very rightly said that 'where there is a will there is a way'. The basic nature of a teacher is compassion and patience, through its help s/he frames and sculpts the lives of the young students and prepares them for facing the bigger world challenges. Teachers being partners in realising the educational objectives should recognize their common goals. They should demonstrate respect for self and each team member. They should engage in active listening; provide feedback openly; offer

information as needed; act together to achieve goals; compromise and allow time for the process to develop. Flexibility, respect, communication are the keys to its success.

The benefits of working together are it is a Shared responsibility. More and better ideas/activities and innovations can be taken up. It keeps sharpening their acquired knowledge and skills, enhances communication skills and provides expertise. This is what is best for the students. Collaborations with special education teachers, related service providers, and paraprofessionals are needed on a regular basis. Proper planning a week ahead with co-teaching partner will help in determining their respective teaching responsibilities and share the work load. In this whole process what is important is to be aware of the students needs and provide them with the best alternatives.

There are certain points we need to ponder upon:

- Remember we are in transition
- We are going through Lots of change
- Change is hard
- Change is good
- We are all here to help each other.

Thus, the education system needs to be a pillar of the democratization process. Inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also all students, educators, parents, and community members. From our deeper understanding and experience it has been found that the schools which embrace inclusion have brought about change by honoring natural diversity with meaningful student-centered learning.

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