



TEACHING EXPERIENCES IN THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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1. Introduction - Inclusive Education, Meaning and Implications: -Inclusive education is participation of all the learners with varying learning styles and abilities belonging to different races, gender, class, generation, geography and needs in a common and identical environment. It deals with how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs, and activities so that all students learn and contribute together. Inclusive education aids peers learn to deal with others that are different from them and how to respect individual differences it also develops self-worth and creates thoughtful communities of learners. This alliance between regular and special educators brings new teaching methods into the universal educational setting. Moreover, it is extremely significant that we all understand the concept - **What inclusive education is and what it is not?**

2. Rationale or Importance of Inclusive Education in Present Era: - Inclusive education is need of the hour with a thought of social transformation with respect to dynamic and equitable societies. This social inclusion does not mean only the physical presence of a group of learners over-riding the differences of race, gender, class, generation, geography, or special needs but inclusive education to the core that ensures full-fledged inclusion and equality with respect to learning experiences, opportunities and so on. Together we need to explore the benefits that general education offers our children and know-how the best practices bring about inclusive education.

3. Background of the topic chosen - My experiences of inclusive teaching in Bhutan: - I was a volunteer teacher and coordinator in the school and taught for 2 years at a primary school Paro town ; Bhutan (2014-2016). This land locked Himalayan country is known for its conservative society, monarchs, and a unique socio-economic concept of Gross national happiness etc. But to my utter surprise no one talked of learning criteria of the students. I learned that the system decides the people should remain like this only **“happy**

with whatever they have". They are provided with toys from time to time to play and be happy but the **"actual learning to the core went all the way missing"**. The exceptional learners or students get scholarships from various countries and grants, Indian Embassy being a major one of them. The students often land up studying in foreign countries for higher education.

4. Why was inclusive teaching required in this set-up? I noticed there was quite a difference amongst the students in the classroom as some of them belonged to the poor economic background, some were orphans, some were so learned and polished belonging to the rich and royal strata, some had special needs, some had just come from a nearby village to experience a classroom for the first time. The mentioned differences were quite challenging for me and of course mind-boggling as teaching with such major heterogeneity in the classes was a challenging job at first! But slowly replacing the prescribed methods of teaching with the innovative teaching methods made my teaching experiences all the way joyful.

5. Challenges to inclusive education and Identification of the problems:-

5.1 Actual learning went missing from the classrooms and the school altogether. Moreover those tiny schools who tried to introduce innovative ideas were crushed by the age-old concepts of parents about Education and this gave me a **challenge** to create an Inclusive environment in my small classroom! Believing that a small change is foundation for an improved one!

5.2 At grass root level I found that the education at primary level and pre-primary was below average due to following reasons: -

- a) Lack of trained teachers (they start teaching in the schools after grade 12th being considered eligible to teach upto primary classes).
- b) Lack of training institutes and colleges.
- c) Lack of Educated gentry to train in the few existing institutes and moreover
- d) Teaching resources grants by various countries die their own death being un-used due lack of trained teachers and motivation to use them.
- e) Dearth of Infra structural resources.
- f) The most important being Inclusion of the children in classrooms with special needs, children of divorced parents (unwilling to study at all), emotionally disturbed students coming from nearby villages that have no idea what a classroom looks like .
- g) I also identified the gender issues like the girls are restricted in a Dress like Kira (National dress of Bhutan) unable to run, play around etc.

- h) The lack of social rituals like marriage and commitment amongst opposite sex leading to early drop outs of students from schools due to teen-age pregnancies.
- i) In a nutshell, I noticed a lot of turmoil in the education system and non-inclusive system, moreover the education ministry was also devoid of the learned and qualified gentry to run it successfully.
- j) Drug -abuse due to dissatisfied life and unfulfilled dreams and aspirations.
- k) Overall a sense of disappointment amongst the teachers,educators,students and youth of the country.

6. The major problems in Creating Inclusive classrooms :-The guts of a teacher decides the plight of inclusive classrooms and it's the attitude and efforts of the teacher that matters the most!

- a) Inclusion is more than physical presence in the classroom. Students learn when they actively participate in the academic lessons and interact with others. We must remember and believe that all students can participate!
- b) Most important is making inclusion necessary and never Give -up saying it is not possible practically! Our actions and attitude must value the students and their independence.
- c) At first it seems almost next to impossible but if this very basic feel of "inclusiveness" is inculcated in the behaviour, reactions or consciousness of the educator then no one can stop it !
- d) I heard so many fellow teachers commenting it's not possible to include each and everyone at a time we have experience of teaching here for 8-10 long years we could not change anything! I just said to myself that we cannot afford to cling to past failures. It's time to focus on the potential of the present to plan future success. In such above mentioned societal arena the need of Inclusive education was needed badly and the success that was achieved made a firm belief in me that if the inclusive teaching practice can help in such a set-up then it should surely work out in India in much better and accelerated way.

7. Objectives of Inclusive teaching:

- a) To create an environment in the classrooms involving all three types of learning: -
 - (i) cooperative learning
 - (ii) competitive learning
 - (iii) individualistic learning.
- b) To make the Co-operative group work accommodate different needs and values individuals' differences.

- c) To adopt essential Skills in the given setup: like social and cooperative skills, communicative skills ,apart from basic skills .

8. Activities conducted and the Solutions Framed and brought to the practice: -

8.1 I personally volunteered a professional development class every Saturday and Sunday and daily mentoring to most of the teachers was taken up by me for all the primary teachers regarding basic teaching methods, discussions using Power point presentations ,group discussions etc.

8.2 After using the general methods of teaching the fellow teachers came up with the limitations of usual teaching techniques with the variety of students in the class(as expected by me) This paved the my way to start the Inclusive education techniques in the school as on how to use inclusive strategies practically in classrooms;followed by live demonstrations in the classrooms observed by teachers from time to time.

8.3 Various methods of group teaching, co-teaching power point presentations, video conferencing of students with the schools of other nations were also conducted with the help of ministry of education department personnel and DCRD(Directorate of research and development wing).

8.4 The old methods of teaching subjects were eventually replaced by some favourite methods of the students such as :- The interview method involving face to face interaction amongst all pupils in the classroom, Role -plays, Enacting dramas along with the Audio -visual teaching ;different kinds of group activities including newspaper publishing, collage making, role-plays ,projects ,games puzzles etc were used moreover field trip to the airport, army camps and participation of the students was made sure.

8.5 A step to begin international student exchange programs was also taken to improve the interactional level of the students; who are actually cut off from rest of the world being landlocked.

8.6 The basic benchmarks or principles were used to coordinate various teaching - learning activities such as :-

9. Mutual interdependence:- Learning activities were structured so that group cannot move ahead without each member participating in it. Examples include activities involving:

- a) **A common group goal:** All the students in the group share same idea or aim. Like for Instance :- Inside / Outside Circle – two circles facing each other, talk in pairs, rotate one circle and so on.It Can be used as a constructive activity for– introductions, class building, sharing any personal news, sharing experiences; revising work (questions on cards or teacher calls out)

- b) **A group reward:**-A gesture of appreciation to the group being the best and inspirational to others students in a class does enhance the learning in the inclusive way!
- c) **Shared materials/resources:**-To bring the really shy ones at par with others in the classroom we used a passing toy method named Rally robin , Mowgli and Mickey Mouse like famous story characters their soft toys were in each class and the one who possess it has to answer the questions, do group leaderships ,present the group views or debate .In this congenial way many of the students who were keeping off any speaking in the class really came up with wonderful ideas with an aim to possess that toy and feel great of themselves increasing their confidence and involvement was 100%.
- d) **Group reflections:-** At the end of the activity the discussions involved personal views of the students were shared and discussed.

10. Confrontational interaction.This involves shared learning activities such as:-

- a) The activities are designed in such a way that everyone is included like for example :- The interview method involving face to face interaction amongst all pupils in the classroom, Role -plays, Enacting dramas along with the Audio -visual teaching ;different kinds of group activities including newspaper publishing, collage making, role-plays ,projects ,games puzzles etc were used moreover field trip to the airport, army camps and participation of the students was made sure.
- b) Active participation is encouraged by developing the communication, enquiry and questioning skills at different places bringing them exposure to different situations in practical life situations.
- c) Moreover the way in which the various skills were developing was also observed and recorded from time to time using the standard techniques (for example, asking questions,giving or receiving explanations) were taught and supervised from time to time.

11. Individual responsibility:- Each and Every member of group of students is answerable for learning the experiences ;by frequent reinforcement so that they help themselves and others as well in the course of understanding task and helping others to learn and understand too!This is done by, for example:

- a) 1- casually selecting one member to report back.
- b) 2-Next was assessing the individuals following group work.
- c) 3- Assigning everyone a specific role.

12. Small group skills were acknowledged as they played different roles assigned to them from time to time. Training in how to work together and cooperative work. They were also taught the specific skills, for example:

- A– moving into groups
- B– listening to others
- C– reassuring others
- D– resolving conflicts
- E- Overall building rapport in the classroom.

13. Teachers Role :-

13.1 Feedback: The teacher or the coordinators give feedback reflecting on how well group is functioning, working together in order to achieve success. The coordinator of the activities seldom gave any negative feedback as to cater the needs of slow learners and so they were motivated most of the times irrespective of the level of accomplished goals. The follow up was generally done by :-

- A– group probing at end of activity.
- B– group grading quality of work/use of skills.
- C– teacher observing and giving feedback.
- D– student observers giving feedback.

13.2 Set objectives for a lesson –

- a) Activities and skills .
- b) Assign students to groups rendering maximum inclusion
- c) Explanation of the activity – what is expected for the group to achieve?
- d) Explain how group to work together, for example:-

- # How to do the specific roles, sharing of resources etc.
- # Help groups with activities and working together in cooperation.
- # Assess students' learning and co-operation from time to time and
- # Maintaining records.

13.3 Teacher selected groups – The making of groups is a tedious task and a coordinator should ensure stability, inclusion and efficiency as well!

- a) Group should be min-4; max-6.
- b) To form groups of homogenous nature first and slowly moving on to heterogenous nature. (simple to complex).

c) Change groups occasionally but not too frequently.

13.4 Assigning group roles as :-

- a) Encouraging the Participation at-first.
- b) Picking up a material manager in the group.
- c) picking up a group leader or orator in the group.
- d) picking up an organiser in the group.
- e) A recorder is optional.
- f) A narrator to convey the group activities to the audience.
- g) A Speaker to speak the conclusion part .
- h) A teacher Observer is optional suiting the need! Etc

13.5 **GOLDEN RULES:** - The group or the members following the rules gets maximum bonus points and perks. The rules include:-

- a) To develop questioning and criticising the thoughts or views but not the people at all.
- b) To maintain dignity of language, etiquettes and grace while doing the activities.
- c) Problem solving self and solving conflicts in the group as well.
- d) Maintain the decorum of the classroom and teaching environment!

14. Comparison with traditional group work

14.1 Traditional groups have homogeneous participation with minimum one leader always on the contrary Co-operative groups heterogeneous participation and leadership is often shared being smooth for inclusion of all students of the class.

14.2 In traditional groups the individual uses own resources with complete independence making group functioning un- important in contrast to the co-operative groups where the resources are shared along with the group interdependence; moreover here the group functioning is most essential feature.

14.3 The traditional group work does not enable any or no reflection at all, while the co-operative learning reflection is of utmost importance!

15. Outcomes of inclusive teaching:

- a) It enhances the actual learning process.
- b) Increases overall student involvement, 'on-task' rate.
- c) It just doubled the teamwork and taught them the 'working together skills.
- d) It nurtured the essence of active problem solving, use of higher level thinking skills.
- e) It Increases overall confidence and understanding .
- f) It teaches the apt behaviour attitudes necessary to work effectively with others.
- g) It Improves ability to view situations from others perspectives.

- h) It also Improves motivates an attitude to work and be active.
- i) It nurtures more positive, supportive relationships between peers.
- j) It made an important slogan for us “Teamwork an important life skill”
- k) Forming ‘teams’.

16. Conclusion: The use of inclusive teaching methods though used successfully for the above mentioned cause needs more research and innovation and also teacher training programs and special training on inclusive teaching during B.Ed.level, moreover it also supports the thought that inclusive teaching practice can help in such a set-up (in a country like Bhutan) then it should surely work out in India in much better and accelerated way. This work of mine makes me truly believe that “everyone’s presence is education’s essence”