



THE CONSTRUCT & CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION; TEACHER'S LENS

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Abstract

Although there is widespread support for inclusion at a philosophical level, there are some concerns that the policy of inclusion is difficult to implement because teachers are not sufficiently well prepared and supported to work in inclusive ways. Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn and feel they belong. In this task, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement, particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. The paper throws light on the definition of inclusion, rationale and rights, need for a systematic approach for identifying excluded groups, Key elements in the shift towards inclusion – Resource & Recourse as well as the lens for inclusion.

Keywords: marginalized children, Inclusive education, inclusion lens.



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Introduction:

“Ignorance ... is a guarantee of marginalization.”

Lewin (2000: 23)

Inclusive education is now seen as central to human rights and equal opportunities and a priority policy objective of liberal democracies. Inclusion challenges all those policies and practices that serve to exclude some children from their right to education. The underpinning ideal is that all children have the right to be educated together regardless of any special need or disability. We may have claims like we have equal male- female ratio, we admit or employ people with disabilities. However there are lots of questions to ask ourselves like are we accepting them as they are? Are we catering to their needs by providing disable friendly infrastructure and facilities? Are we treating them with the same dignity like others in the organization? So on and so forth. I am sure we don't have convincing answers to these questions.

Over the years, the concept of inclusive education has replaced the term integrated and Special education. Inclusion is not confined to the disabled. It also means non exclusion; i.e., embracing all (NCF-2005). It refers to an education system that accommodates all

children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. An inclusive class may have amongst others, differently abled children or gifted children, street or working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children belonging to ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities or children from other disadvantaged or unrecognized groups. We need to understand that our strength lies in diversity and not similarity. There is a need for readiness assessment before taking any step towards creating inclusive classrooms and an inclusive society. An inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction. (Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, Helsinki, July 2008)

The author has tried to enlist ‘A to W’ of marginalized children.

A TO W OF MARGINALIZED CHILDREN

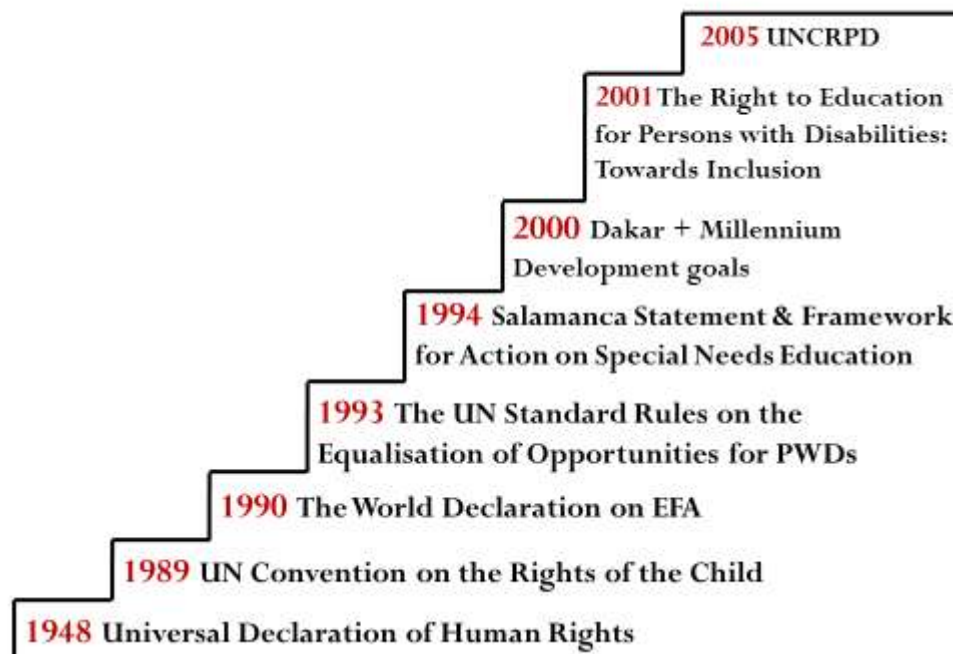
- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ● Abandoned children | ● Institutionalized children |
| ● Abused children | ● Married children |
| ● Arrested children | ● Mentally ill children |
| ● Asylum seeking children | ● Migrant children |
| ● Beggars | ● Nomadic children |
| ● Child labourers | ● Orphans |
| ● Child mothers | ● Poor children |
| ● Child prostitutes | ● Pregnant girls |
| ● Children born out of wedlock | ● Refugee children |
| ● Conscripted children | ● Rural children |
| ● Delinquent children | ● Sans papiers children |
| ● Detained children | ● Sexually exploited children |
| ● Disabled children | ● Sold and purchased children |
| ● Homeless children | ● Stateless children |
| ● HIV infected children | ● Street children |
| ● Illegal working children | ● Trafficked children |
| ● Illiterate children | ● Traveller children |
| ● Imprisoned children | ● War affected children |
| ● Indigenous children | ● Working children |
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“I want to go to school because I want to learn, and I want to be educated and I want to define my life, to be independent, to be strong, and also to live my life and be happy.”

- A marginalized child

The Movement for Inclusion:

Inclusion is seen as a significant comprehensive movement challenging exclusionary & derivational practices. Difference comes in many guises, and is often defined subjectively as well as culturally. The inclusion policy was nothing more than illusionary and perhaps it was much about inequity than equity. Let’s see an overview of major international policy documents pertaining to education of disabled children and youth.



In understanding inclusion, it is important to remember the following elements:

Inclusion IS about:	Inclusion is NOT about:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcoming diversity • benefiting all learners, not only targeting the excluded • children in school who may feel excluded by providing equal access to education or making certain provisions for certain categories of children without excluding them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reforms of special education alone, but reform of both the formal and non-formal education system • responding only to diversity, but also improving the quality of education for all learners • special schools but perhaps additional support to students within the regular school system • meeting the needs of children with disabilities only • meeting one child’s needs at the expense of another child

Attitudes and values – how can they affect inclusion?

It has been shown that teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusion depend strongly on their experience with learners who are perceived as "challenging". Teacher education, the availability of support within the classroom, class size and overall workload are all factors which influence teachers' attitudes. Several studies have revealed that negative attitudes of teachers and adults (parents and other family members) are the major barrier to inclusion; children do not have prejudices unless adults show them. Thus, introducing inclusion as a guiding principle in these different areas will have implications for teachers' attitudes.

Shared values make cooperation possible, just as lack of them makes it difficult for people to work together. However, when common values are lacking, common interests, which are precursors to values, may substitute for them and in daily life are often a significant driving force. Changes in attitudes involve significant changes in conceptions and role behaviour. Among other factors, this is why change is so difficult to achieve.

Negative attitudes towards differences and resulting discrimination and prejudice in society manifests itself as a serious barrier to learning. However, it is a barrier that can be overcome through the practice of inclusion and is not a necessary pre-cursor to the process. There are many misconceptions surrounding inclusion that often serve as obstacles to adopting an inclusive approach at the policy level. Among them are:

- _ Inclusion is costly
- _ implementing inclusion needs societal change in attitudes first
- _ Inclusion is a positive theoretical concept, but is not practical
- _ Inclusion requires special skills and capacities that are difficult to develop
- _ Inclusion is the responsibility of the Social Ministry and not of the Ministry of Education
- _ Inclusion is a disability-specific issue

Overcoming these misconceptions about inclusion is one of the challenges to change.

Furthermore, in the process of changes required for incorporating inclusion as a guiding principle, conflict and disagreement can occur. This is both inevitable and is fundamental to successful change. Individuals involved in a change process may require some pressure to change, but change will only be effective when they are able and allowed to react to form their own positions on the change process. In many cases, policymakers, parents, teachers and other stakeholders in the school need to realise that inclusion is a process which requires changes at both the level of the education system as well as the school level. This can be

challenging to accept as it may involve readjusting conceptual understandings and may have multiple practical consequences. “Some deep changes are at stake when we realise that people’s basic conceptions of the school system are involved, i.e. their occupational identity and sense of competence.”

The implementation of more inclusive systems of education is possible if schools themselves are committed to becoming more inclusive. The development of enabling mechanisms such as national policies on inclusion, local support systems and appropriate forms of curriculum and assessment are important in creating the right context for the development of inclusion. Inclusion has important benefits for all children as it produces schools with more enriching learning environments that view diversity as a positive force which must be acknowledged and celebrated. Inclusion produces schools that move away from rote learning and place greater emphasis on hands-on, experienced based, active and co-operative learning.

Why Inclusion –Rationale & Rights:

In particular, four key elements have tended to feature strongly in the conceptualization of inclusion. The four elements are as follows:

1. ***Inclusion is a process.*** That is to say, inclusion has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference. In this way differences come to be seen more positively as a stimulus for fostering learning, amongst children and adults.
2. ***Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers.*** Consequently, it involves collecting, collating and evaluating information from a wide variety of sources in order to plan for improvements in policy and practice. It is about using evidence of various kinds to stimulate creativity and problem-solving.
3. ***Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students.*** Here “presence” is concerned with where children are educated, and how reliably and punctually they attend; “participation” relates to the quality of their experiences whilst they are there and, therefore, must incorporate the views of the learners themselves; and “achievement” is about the outcomes of learning across the curriculum, not merely test or examination results.
4. ***Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.*** This indicates the moral

responsibility to ensure that those groups that are statistically most “at risk” are carefully monitored, and that, where necessary, steps are taken to ensure their presence, participation and achievement in the education system.

Key elements in the shift towards inclusion – Resource & Recourse:

Incorporating inclusion as a guiding principle typically requires change in education systems, and this change process is frequently faced with several challenges. It involves important shifts and changes at the systems as well as at the societal level.

To understand change at all levels, it is important to know what change looks like from different points of view. How the teacher, student, local and national government see the change, is vital to understand how individuals and groups act and, indeed, react to each other. Reforming school systems to become inclusive is not only about putting in place recently-developed inclusive policies that meet the needs of all learners, but also about changing the culture of classrooms, schools, districts and universities etc. It is important to note that these change processes towards inclusion often begin on a small scale and involve overcoming some obstacles such as:

1. Existing attitudes and values
2. Lack of understanding
3. Lack of necessary skills
4. Limited resources
5. Inappropriate organization

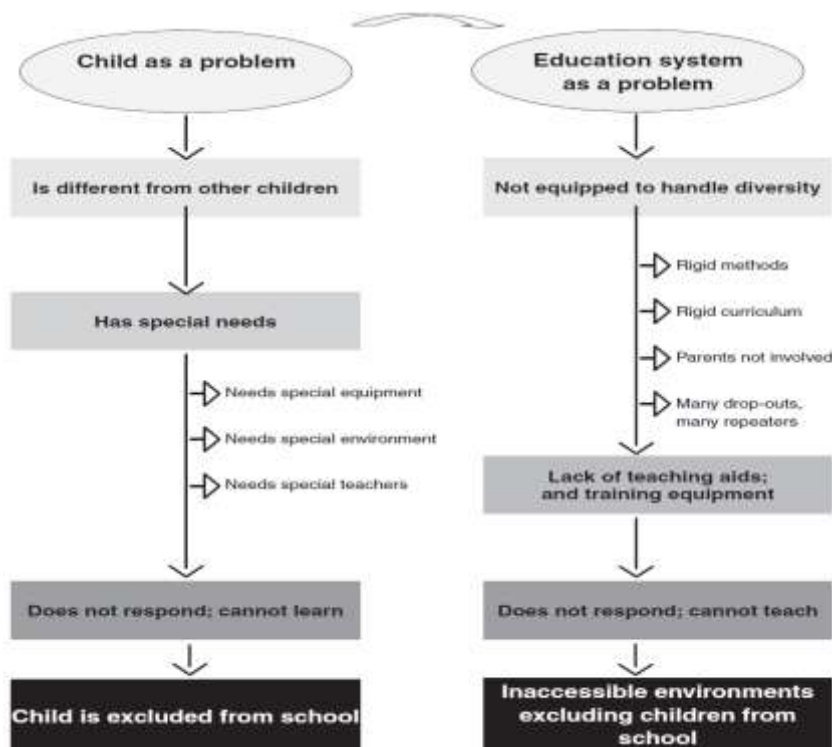
Accepting change is really about learning. It means that schools should foster environments where teachers learn from their experience in the same way that they expect their pupils to learn from the tasks and activities in which they are engaged. Teachers who regard themselves as learners in the classroom are more likely to successfully facilitate the learning of their pupils. The sensitivity they acquire as a result of reflecting on their own attempts to learn new ideas or new ways of working is influential in terms of the way children are dealt with in their classes.

Role of Teacher in Inclusive Education (Education through the Inclusion Lens):

1. Identification of the children with disabilities in the classroom.
2. Referring the identified to the experts for further examination and treatment.
3. Accepting the children with disabilities.
4. Developing positive attitude between normal and disabled children.

5. Placing the children in the classroom in proper places so that they feel comfortable and are benefited by the classroom interaction.
6. Removing architectural barriers wherever possible so that children with disabilities move independently.
7. Involving the children with disabilities in almost all the activities of the classroom.
8. Making suitable adaptation in the curriculum transaction so that the children with disabilities learn according to their

Seeing education through the inclusion lens implies a shift from seeing the child as a problem to seeing the education system as the problem that can be solved through inclusive approaches....



Conclusion:

Education in this landscape would be reframed within the principles of human rights, democracy, equity and social justice within which inclusion policy’s ultimate aim would be to develop schools where all children could participate and be treated equitably (Sandhill, 2005). In converting this aim into reality teachers must address “discrimination, equality... and the status of vulnerable groups in society” (Sandhill, 2005, p.1). In this form, education in this space would become a moral concept necessitating the expression of the values of self fulfilment, self-determination and equity. However, for Bernstein (1996), an

essential prerequisite to the promotion of cultural democracy, is that the individual has the right to participate and to be included within society at a social, intellectual and cultural level. For this new space to become effective, teachers and government control has then to be challenged. Schools have to recognize that relations of dominance exist in society and that obstacles to effective education have become embedded in simple everyday habits of this new inclusion world (Slee, 2001). My belief is that if this world is to move beyond the “phenomena of structure” (Clough, 2005, p.74) and be built upon human rights and the democratic imperative, it must give preference to strategies of empowerment, thereby providing equal and equitable opportunity for all.

“Education is not about filling a pail; it’s about lighting a fire”.

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