INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SOME REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, debates over disabilities have been dominated by two concepts: 'Inclusive' and 'integrated' education. This article reviews the conceptual and empirical researches on inclusive education. Inclusive education of students with disabilities in general education contexts has been a global movement. This paper highlighted conditions for successful inclusion of students with disabilities; instructions in inclusive schools; guidelines for inclusive education for CWSN; teachers' practices in inclusive class and the progress of students with high incidence disabilities in inclusive setting. Impact of inclusion on students' adjustment; impact of social interaction on communication skills of students with disabilities; principals' attitudes and perceptions of teachers toward inclusion were also highlighted. Further, social relationships; peer support; support system to students with disabilities for their educational inclusion and barriers to inclusion and students' accessibility to different supports for their educational inclusion were also reviewed.
Keywords: *inclusion; inclusive education; CWSN; peer support; support system; accessibility;*

INTRODUCTION

Indian understandings of disability and educational needs are demonstrated through the interchangeable use of several English terms which hold different meanings in the north. For example, children with special needs or special educational needs tend to be perceived as children with disabilities in India, as demonstrated by Mukhopadhyay and Mani's (2002) chapter on 'Education of Children with Special Needs' in a NIEPA government-funded research report, which solely pertains to children with disabilities.

'Inclusive' and 'integrated' education are also concepts that are used interchangeably (Julka, 2005; Singal, 2005a), understood as the placement of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, with the provision of aids and appliances, and specialist training for the teacher on how to 'deal with' students with disabilities. There is little engagement with the connotations of school, curriculum, and teacher flexibility for all children. These rigid, categorical interpretations of subtly different northern concepts are perhaps a reflection of not only the government tendency to categorize and label (Julka, 2005; Singal, 2005a) but also a cultural one, most explicitly enforced through the rigidly categorised caste system.

"Inclusion is a philosophy that urges schools, neighborhoods, and communities to welcome and value everyone, regardless of differences. Central to the philosophy of inclusion are the beliefs that everyone belongs, diversity is valued, and we can all learn from each other" (Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow & Stoxen, 2003).

Inclusion in context of education is the practice, in which students with special educational needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students. Inclusive education is a human right, it is good education and it makes good social sense. By RTE (right of education) in inclusive education state shall be ensured an inclusive education system at all levels. By this, inclusive education lays foundation to an inclusive society accepting, respecting and celebrating diversity. It brings social justice and equity in educational system.

Inclusive education can be defined as placing differently abled students in age-appropriate general education classes in nearest school by proving quality instruction, interventions, and supports to enable them successful in the core curriculum. Main objective of inclusive education is to make students with disabilities fundamentally competent like students without disabilities, so that all students shall participant in their classrooms and in the local school community. That is they can enjoy field trips and after-school activities together. They can participate in student government together. and they can attend the same sports meets and plays.

Further, Inclusive Education (IE) is an approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties along with the normal ones. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with a special focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. It aims to ensure that these children are accorded equal rights and opportunities in education. The inclusive education does not have one single definition or method of implementation to suit all individuals and situations. It stresses more on evolving inclusive practices which can be adapted in various contexts. Inclusive education is the central means for achieving the goals of 'Education for all promoting a child-centered approach to teaching and learning throughout the life course.

Use of teaching assistants or specialists; **inclusive curriculum** and **parental involvement** are the basic elements of inclusive education. Specialist staff has the potential to be inclusive or divisive. For instance, a specialist who helps teachers address the needs of all students is working inclusively. A specialist who pulls students out of class to work with them individually on a regular basis is not. An inclusive curriculum includes locally relevant

themes and contributions by marginalized and minority groups. It avoids binary narratives of good and bad, and allows adapting the curriculum to the learning styles of children with special education needs. Most schools strive for some level of parental involvement, but it is often limited to emails home and occasional parent–teacher conferences. In a diverse school system, inclusion means thinking about multiple ways to reach out to parents on their own terms.

SOME REFLECTIONS

Hunt and Farron-Davis (1992) found a significant increase in Individualized Education Plan quality in measures of age appropriateness, functionality, and generalizations when students were moved from a self-contained classroom to a general education classroom.

Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis & Goetz, L. (1994) looked at engagement of students with severe disabilities within general education. They found that there was an increase in the amount of instruction for functional activities for students with severe disabilities within general education compared to self-contained classrooms. Students in self-contained classrooms were less engaged and more isolated.

Cushing and Kennedy (1997) trained typical peers to adapt class activities, provide frequent feedback, and promote communication among other support strategies for three students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. Results indicated that serving as a peer support resulted in higher levels of engagement for students without disabilities which is consistent with previous studies employing peer-mediated techniques. This challenges the assumption that having a typical peer support a student with a disability takes away from their participation in the classroom.

Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, (1998). found that general education setting provided more instruction time, a comparable about of one-on-one time, addressed content curriculum more, and engaged in peer-modeling more.

McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) reported that students demonstrate higher levels of social interaction with typical peers, social competence and communication skills improve.

Waldron, Cole, and Majd (2001) investigated the effects of inclusive programs for students with high incidence disabilities and their typical peers. This two-year study found that 41.7% of students with learning disabilities made progress in math in general education classes compared to 34% in traditional special education settings, without the presence of nondisabled peers. Gains in reading were comparable in both settings. When comparing

progress with their typical peers, 43.3% of students with disabilities made comparable or greater progress in math in inclusive settings versus 35.9% in traditional settings.

Fisher and Frey (2001) described the experience of three students (elementary, middle, and high) with significant disabilities and the supports/services necessary for them to access the core curriculum in general education classrooms.

Kliewer and Biklen (2001) found that inclusive learning environments facilitated the acquisition of literacy and adaptive skills as well as enhancing students' social relationships.

Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) reported that less than 10% of studies with students with severe disabilities focused on academics, with some research showing success in functional academics and access skills in general education environments. Clearly, the use of curriculum adaptations such as content specific modifications is necessary for the successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities.

Praisner (2003) examined principals' attitudes toward inclusion including their placement perceptions. Out of 408 principals surveyed, only one in five held positive attitudes toward inclusion. Factors that were associated with positive attitudes included experiences with students with disabilities and exposure to special education concepts. Furthermore, principals who had positive attitudes were more likely to place students in less restrictive settings. Clearly, teacher and administrator attitudes are critical factors that shape the experiences of students with disabilities.

According to a study conducted by Robertson, Chamberlain, and Kasari (2003), when teachers have positive perceptions of their relationship with students with disabilities, the students' behavior problems were reported to be lower, and the students were more socially included with peers.

Wagner, Newman, Cameto and Levine (2006) studied the outcome of 11,000 students with all types of disabilities and found that more time in a general education classroom correlated to less absence from school, fewer referrals for misbehavior, and more post-secondary education and employment options.

Soukup and colleagues (2007) examined the use of adaptations for students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms as well as the relationship between access to the general education curriculum and classroom variables. Researchers found that students with severe disabilities worked on grade level standards in 60% of the intervals and worked on standards linked to any grade for 20% of the intervals. Curriculum adaptations (changes to

content representation, presentation, or student engagement) were observed in 18% of the intervals with no observations of curriculum augmentations (learning-to-learn strategies).

Soukup,Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird (2007) concluded that students receiving instruction in general education were significantly more likely to be working on activities linked to the general education standards, although they were doing so without the types of adaptations that research suggests is critical for making progress.

Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) found that teachers generally supported co-teaching but the instructional techniques employed did not necessarily reflect prevailing best practices in the literature. The predominant model of co-teaching was "one teach, one assist" even though this is not a highly recommended practice in that the special educator often plays a subordinate role.

Mattingly. J et al., (2010) in a guidance note by Department of International Development discussed about perceived barriers (physical, social, financial) to educating children with disabilities and talked about low school budget resulting in lack of appropriate facilities, inadequate teachers training in inclusive methodology, lack of awareness of disability among teachers and many others that acts as a barrier in educating children with special needs.

Kaur, (2013), examined access to physical environment as well as access to curriculum and the teaching environment of children with special needs and emphasized on adoption of inclusive approaches in education so that the goal of 'Education for all' can be achieved.

MHRD, Guidelines for Inclusive Education for CWSN (2014) also discussed about major challenges and Issues in education of CWSN which includes Assessment of CWSN, Lack of Resource teachers, Lack of well equipped sufficient resource rooms, Removal of Architectural Barriers and Quality access to CWSN and so on.

Banik, et.al., (2015) studied the awareness of Barrier Free Environment with hearing impairment in Inclusive schools and results revealed that teachers were more aware towards examination related barriers while environmental barriers were least under their consideration and suggested that appropriate educational and technical input is necessary to create an optimal barrier free environment.

Ishmael (2015) examined social and physical barriers to learners with physical disabilities and also illuminates the strategies that may be used to minimize such barriers to ensure smooth inclusion in regular schools.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education has received considerable attention, which has been largely initiated by engagement of students with severe disabilities within general education (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead., 1992). Some researchers suggested conditions for successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Curtis & Goetz, L.,1994) ; instructions in inclusive schools (Browder and Cooper-Duffy, 2003); Soukup,Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007 and guidelines for inclusive education for CWSN (MHRD, 2014). Praisner (2003) studied principals' attitudes whereas Robertson, Chamberlain, and Kasari (2003) examined the perceptions of teachers toward inclusion. Further, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) studied teachers' practices in inclusive class and Waldron, Cole, and Majd (2001) examined the progress of students with high incidence disabilities in inclusive setting.

Some researchers stressed the urgency of support system to students with disabilities for their educational inclusion. Fisher and Frey (2001) reported that the supports/services are necessary for disabled for inclusion. Cushing and Kennedy (1997); Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, (1998) suggested peer support whereas Kliewer and Biklen (2001) believed in social relationships for educational inclusion. Wagner, Newman, Cameto and Levine (2006) examined the impact of inclusion on students' adjustment, whereas McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) studied the impact of social interaction on communication skills of students with disabilities. Mattingly. J et al., (2010) Banik, et.al., (2015); Ishmael (2015) highlighted barriers to inclusion whereas students' accessibility to different supports for their inclusion was also studied by Kaur, (2013).

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