



## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**Kamble Mohan. S., Ph. D.**

*Associate Professor, Adarsha Comprehensive College of Education and Research,  
Karve Road, Pune-411004.*

Inclusive Education means when every child is welcomed and valued regardless of ability or disability. Inclusive education stands for improvement of schools in all dimensions to address the educational needs of all children.

Inclusive schools 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.”

This diversity is further reflected in disparities of educational achievement. For example in Kerala the literacy rate recorded in the 2001 census was 90.92%, while in Bihar it was 47.53% (GOI, 2002). As a result, the overall (average) literacy rate for India was 65.38% which, while a representative figure cannot reflect the complexity of context. Added to this issue of averaging out statistics in such a vast country is the fact that when census data was collected there were some areas which were cut off by “disturbances” or “natural calamities” (GOI, 2002:11) such as the Kashmir conflict, floods or landslides. Data on children with disabilities seems to be unreliable, “selective reporting” of obvious physical impairments, or children being hidden by their families out of shame. A basic disability statistic was recently included in the 2001 Census for the first time, as a result of campaigning by the Indian disability movement.

In India disability is measured in five categories – sight, speech, hearing, locomotors and mental which excludes disabilities such as autism. It is worth noting that according to the 2002 National Sample Survey, only 45% of the disabled population is literate, and 9% has secondary level education or higher.

Inclusive Education: is a shift of emphasis on the task of persons providing educational services to make sure that the educational settings were adjusted to accommodate

the special educational needs rather than trying to make the children with disabilities fit into the given educational settings. (Inclusive education, 1995)

Inclusive education means: a shift in services from simply trying to fit the child in to “normal settings”; it is a supplemental support for their disabilities or special needs and promotes the child’s overall development in an optimal setting. It has to include a consideration of overall organization, curriculum and classroom practice, support for learning and staff development.

Special Needs Education: is an education system that aims at all children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weakness, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not the education systems that have a right to certain types of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all children.

### **Meaning of Inclusive Education:**

Inclusive education is based on the principle that schools should provide for all children regardless of any perceived difference, disability or other social, cultural and linguistic difference. The diverse needs of these learners and the quest to make schools more learning-friendly requires regular and special education teachers to consult and collaborate with one another as well as with family and community in order to develop effective strategies, teaching and learning (Jelas, 2010) within inclusive setups. With the right training, strategies and support nearly all children with SEN and disabilities can be included successfully in mainstream education.

According to Barton (1997), “Inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of ALL children and young people and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice”/ The ‘*Index for Inclusion*’ (Booth and Ainscow, 2011, 3rd edition) summarizes some of the ideas which make up the view of inclusion within the Index as follows (CSIE, 2014): Inclusion in education involves:

- Putting inclusive values into action.
- Viewing every life and every death as of equal worth.
- Supporting everyone to feel that they belong.

- Increasing participation for children and adults in learning and teaching activities, relationships and communities of local schools.
- Reducing exclusion, discrimination, barriers to learning and participation.
- Restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally.
- Linking education to local and global realities.
- Learning from the reduction of barriers for some children to benefit children more widely.
- Viewing differences between children and between adults as resources for learning.
- Acknowledging the right of children to an education of high quality in their locality.
- Improving schools for staff and parents/carers as well as children.
- Emphasising the development of school communities and values, as well as achievements.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and surrounding communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

### **Inclusive Education in India**

In India, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) joined hands with UNICEF and launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in the year 1987, to strengthen the integration of learners with disabilities into regular schools. In 1997, IEDC was amalgamated with other major basic education projects like the DPEP (Chadha, 2002) and the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) (Department of Elementary Education, 2000). The Persons with Disability Act, 1995 has a provision of providing education to children with special needs in the most appropriate environment. The SSA launched by the Govt. of India, in 2001, underlines the prerogative of a child with disability to be included in the mainstream of education.

MHRD (2006) in its *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) framework clearly states that “SS will ensure that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided education in an appropriate environment. SSA will adopt **zero rejection policy** so that no child is left out of the education system. It will also support a wide range of approaches, options and strategies for education of children with special needs.” Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) was approved in India

in September, 2008 to replace IEDC Scheme from 2009-10. The Scheme is 100% centrally funded.

### **Opportunities of Inclusive Education**

“It provides students with disabilities access to students without disabilities access to curricular and textbooks to which most other students are exposed”.

The Education and Training Policy confirms the importance of early childhood education .it has further confirmed that efforts should be made to enable the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs. But when we see the practice of our country, there is no effort made to enable them learns according to their needs and potential.

The Higher Education Proclamation According to the higher Education Proclamation No.650/2009 article 40, states that institutions shall make, to extent possible, their facilities and programs amenable to use with relative ease by physically challenged students. It has also clearly stated that students with disabilities shall during their stay in the institution of higher learning, get special support to pursue their education effectively. In addition to these there are also other education related policy documents which promote the implementation of inclusive education such as the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-IV), the Special Needs Education Strategy Program.

### **Teacher Education Programmes**

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. This reinforces the ‘difference’ of children with disabilities who, some believe, can only be taught by teachers qualified specifically for them. Although, it is ultimately teacher treatment of students in the classroom, rather than the training, that would reinforce this difference. Interestingly, distrust in both the special and mainstream education systems leads some parents to keep children with disabilities at home for fear of their abuse or neglect in the classroom; which may then be interpreted by teachers as a lack of community interest in education for their children. There is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel equipped to teach children with disabilities and complain that they need more time to instruct these students. Many government programmes have included a teacher training component in an attempt to instigate institutional change. However, a ‘special needs’

focus and a lack of training for management, combined with didactic training methodology do little to alter the classroom. The poor quality educational provision in many schools is reflected in the fact that many govt. job reservations for adults with disabilities remain unfilled. It is more likely to be directly related to the fact that very few children with disabilities get to, or stay in, school that there is a lack qualified, let alone confident.

### **Prospects of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. An increasing number of publications, policy papers, workshops etc. have supported the ideology of inclusion. Some organizations and people, however, doubt whether the ordinary classroom can provide quality education for disabled children. This debate has been on, ever since people began to voice their reservation against old segregated institutions and in turn raised their concern for equality of disabled children. These concerns must be taken seriously and dispelled by showing examples of positive experiences, which clearly demonstrate that inclusive education most definitely addresses quality issues in education. The major goal of inclusive education is the Flagship goal. Recognizing the right to educational efforts to provide access to quality education for every child, youth and adult with a disability. The Flagship has been formed by an alliance of diverse organizations, including global disability organizations, international developmental agencies, intergovernmental agencies, and experts in the field of special and inclusive education.

### **In order to reach this goal, the flagship will:**

- ❖ Have the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the design of all Flagship activities.
- ❖ Promote the full participation of persons with disabilities and families in the development of policies and guidelines related to the education of persons with disabilities at local, national, regional and global levels.
- ❖ Seek to ensure that all governmental entities, donors and NGOs endorse the universal right to education for all children, youth and adults with a disability.
- ❖ Act as a catalyst to fully incorporate the Flagship goal into national plans of action and regional policies.
- ❖ Identify and disseminate effective practices and stimulate research and studies related to the Flagship goal to include such areas as:
  - Quality teacher education

- Curriculum and pedagogy
- ❖ School organization including adequate accessible facilities

Thus, we as teachers, parents, teacher-educators etc. have to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education not only as a program but also as an ideology- an ideology based on the principles of human rights approach wherein stress is laid on giving importance to the individual and respecting his/her potentiality in the teaching- learning process.

In short, it is important to remember that Inclusive education is at a very early stage of conceptualization and implementation in India. The fact that it is being discussed, debated and in some places implemented although falteringly, demonstrates a willingness to engage with elements with elements of a new concept that has the potential to be developed in the future in a positive manner.

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