

RELEVANCE OF MINDFULNESS IN PARENT EDUCATION FOR INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Parents play a pivotal role in shaping their child's future. They want to be loving, provide structure, and have rules and consequences. Parents need to instill qualities and values in the child such that the child is happy and flourishes in a school with an inclusive setup. So, Parent Education is very important as parents are the permanents in their child's life. The parents' priorities, strengths and competencies would determine the success/failure of the plans made for the child. This paper discusses the relevance, that is, the degree of usefulness of education of parents in bringing about inclusion in classrooms. It states the need of parent education, the connection between the mindfulness education and inclusion in classrooms, and explores the means and methods of attaining parent education for inclusive classrooms. As and how this happens, the changes in the classrooms are going to be satisfying, not only of having accepted diversity in classrooms but also in the society.

It would lead the child to understand that diversity is a part of one's life and being equipped to embrace that, would be a true mark of a worthy Parent!!

Keywords: Mindfulness, Parent Education, Inclusive Classrooms.



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Introduction:

Parent, a single word which brings to the fore a myriad of emotions. Becoming one heralds inexplicable joy. It is sheer bliss that rules the mind and the senses as one basks in the beginning of the journey called 'PARENTHOOD'.

Rarely does one realize at this juncture, that, this very moment has in fact ushered in the responsibilities and commitments of being a worthy parent. Does this suggest being a perfect parent?

To quote a Parenting Expert, Sue Atkins:

“There is no such thing as a perfect parent,
So just be a real one.”

Parenting is not a concept which is novel to the 21st century but parenting, which is in sync with the present ever evolving generation, is definitely a challenge. So, no longer can a parent have that “I know all” attitude.

As the child grows, one realizes that there is so much in this role of a parent which the books and the elders haven’t taught. It’s an experiential kind of a learning and has no specific syllabus or a rule book to look stuff up in. The parent is trying one’s best to groom the child and keep him happy. Every parent wants the child to be a perfect fit at home, in the classroom, and in the society.

This is possible only if the child is acquainted with and adapted to the diversity around him.

Definitions:

To understand the nuances and role of parents in bringing about inclusion, let’s consider the terms involved.

1. Relevance: According to Cambridge online Dictionary (2021), relevance means the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being talked about. So, here it is the connection and the pertinence of the parent’s know-how, attitude and approach and the ease with which the child can gel with inclusive classrooms.

2. Parent: According to Cambridge online Dictionary (2021), parent means a father or mother; someone who gives birth to or nurtures the child. It is the parents who happen to be the first teachers of the child and whom the child looks up to.

3. Inclusive Education: UNESCO, in a Paper Commissioned for the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report, Inclusion and Education, defines inclusive education as a process intended to respond to students’ diversity by increasing their participation and reducing exclusion within and from education.

An inclusive classroom would be such that all students, regardless of any challenges are in an age- appropriate classroom and receive instructions and support. For this to happen, a spirit of collaboration and positive energy should pervade in classrooms and the school as a whole.

Literature Review:

In order to search the literature available on the same topic, the researchers surveyed various research journals, PhD thesis, and other information sources. The literature found relevant and /or related with the current topic is reported below.

Xu and Filler (2008) suggests that parental involvement is important for the education of children of all ages but is crucial for the success of children in inclusive settings.

So, if the parent has some know-how and is updated, his contribution would be more.

Courtney E. Ackerman (2021) in a blog article states that mindfulness practices in students have innumerable advantages to offer.

Chuck Barbieri (2007) lists seven key aspects of mindful parenting, which deserve close scrutiny from all people who work or spend time with children.

Townshend et al (2016) opined contradictory in an article, 'The effectiveness of mindful parenting programs in promoting parents' and children's wellbeing: a systematic review', that no conclusive evidence is seen about the relationship between mindfulness and the well-being of the child and the parent.

Regarding this, the researchers have noted that with respect to Indian context, there is a close connection between mindfulness and the well-being of the child. This could be attributed to the family structure in Indian households where joint families are common.

In a blog by Lisa Kring, in HuffPost, (2013) in the article, 'The 5 Main Tenets of Mindful Parenting' the author explains the 5 ways by which mindfulness can be practiced and help in better parent – child connections.

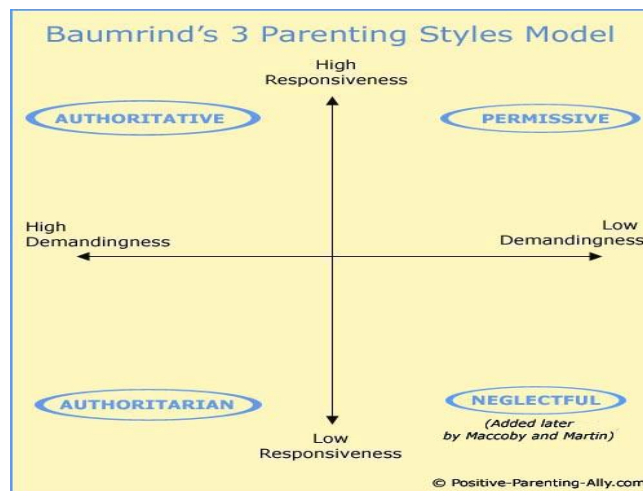
After reviewing the above literature, the researchers concluded that such and many other research work is available related to Mindfulness and Mindful Parenting and Special Education. The literature is rich with ways and means to attain Mindfulness for oneself and some work on mindfulness for interpersonal relationships is also documented. Most of these are papers, experiments and programs where the studies have been done in countries other than India. There is very less work, done and/or documented, about mindfulness, parenting and inclusion in the Indian context. This paper attempts to discuss the relevance, that is, the degree of usefulness of mindfulness in Parent Education for Inclusive Classrooms.

Need of Parent Education for Inclusive Classrooms:

A. Why Parent Education?

Parenting can be of four different styles.

The outcome of the various styles can be seen as:



1. Children of authoritative parents are:

(The parent is demanding and responsive.)

- ▶ Appear happy and content.
- ▶ Are more independent.
- ▶ Achieve higher academic success.
- ▶ Develop good self-esteem
- ▶ Interact maturely with peers.
- ▶ Have better mental health.

2. Children of authoritarian parents:

(The parent is demanding but not responsive.)

- ▶ Are less independent.
- ▶ Appear insecure.
- ▶ Possess lower self-esteem.
- ▶ Exhibit more behavioral problems.
- ▶ Perform worse academically.
- ▶ Have poorer social skills.

3. Children of permissive parenting:

(The parent is demanding but not responsive.)

- ▶ Cannot follow rules.
- ▶ Have worse self-control.
- ▶ Possess egocentric tendencies.
- ▶ Encounter issues in relationships and social interactions.

4. Children of neglectful parents:

(The parent is undemanding and unresponsive.)

- ▶ Cannot self-regulate emotion.
- ▶ Encounter more delinquency and addictions problems.
- ▶ Have more mental issues like suicidal behavior in adolescents.
- ▶ Are more impulsive.

But parenting styles are different from parenting practices which involve specific actions on a routine or daily basis. Children of age 5 to 13 years are at an impressionable age.

Parenting practices or habits today need to be overhauled, ever adapting and ever evolving with times.

Since times bygone, parents have been completely immersed in the upbringing of their children. The families were joint and not only the parents but the family members too joined in. But times have changed the family scenario. Joint families gradually became nuclear and both the parents started working. This led to decline in the time spent with the child and to the increase in permissive, neglected or authoritarian type of parenting.

Herein comes the need for Parent education with respect to adaptability of the child's classroom diversity and the skills he would require to belong there.

B. *Why Parent Education for Inclusive classrooms? The connection?*

Inclusive Education in Classrooms:

According to Alquraini & Gut (2012), Inclusive Education is when all students, regardless of any challenges, are placed in an age-appropriate general education classes that are in their nearby schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and supports that help to succeed.

So, inclusion is where all the students learn at the same place irrespective of physical, socio-cultural, intellectual, and the economic aspects. The students with or without disabilities should be a part of the mainstream education.

Inclusion has to be evident, observable and such that all can participate in all the activities in school.

If one were to turn back some pages and delve into the history of inclusion, it would come as a surprise that it was prevalent in India right from the times of Gurukul Shikshan. It was somewhere during the times of the British rule that the gap in exclusion developed and widened over the years. It led to exclusion on the basis of differences in culture, economics, intelligence and physical abilities.

This does not begin in schools, but at homes where the parents are instrumental in forming these ideas and concepts of diversity. So, this exercise of parent education, if done at the grass root level, that is at home, we could easily inculcate inclusion within diversity.

How can Mindfulness in Parents help in building Inclusive classrooms?

Parents can be educated to be mindful and thus empowered by working on the ‘4 A’s’ needed to build inclusion in the classrooms.

The 4A’s of mindfulness are:

- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Attitude building
- Active participation

These need to be developed to include physical, socio- cultural, intellectual, and the economic aspects.

Once the parents inculcate these habits in them, these feelings of inclusion based on the above dimensions will cascade to the child. So, it becomes a win-win situation wherein both the parent and the child benefit.

The Parent will:

- become more non- judgmental.
- build positive relationships with children, their teachers and other parents too.
- have self-satisfaction and optimism.
- accept one’s own child as he or she is.
- learn to accept child’s peers.
- empathize with people with special needs.
- learn to respect the individuality of one’s child.
- rise above ‘ I ’.
- be aware of the differences among their child’s peers.
- develop a positive approach towards inclusion.
- involve in co- curricular activities, support the other parents and the management to bring about inclusion in classrooms.

The Child will:

- accept and understand that there are going to be differences and one needs to embrace them.
- learn to accept differences in multicultural, intellectual, economic aspects amongst peers.
- become more tolerant.

- become more compassionate and kinder.
- realize that society also calls for such inclusion.
- learn by imaging the parent.

Thus, the child will get seamlessly woven into the diversity of his classroom.

Means and Methods to attain Mindfulness in Parents for Inclusive Classrooms.

Now that the connection between the parent education and its impact on inclusive classrooms has been established, let us look into the HOW of it.

How can parent education and mindfulness in parents be brought about?

While one would love to see the inclusion happen, it doesn't come easy, like a magic wand moving and lo – and – behold, the results.

Of course, there cannot be a fixed recipe for achieving 'inclusive classrooms', but the parents in collaboration with the schools can work together to create their own 'flavor' of inclusion.

Accordingly, researchers would like to suggest a few Means and Methods.

Collaboration with NGOs:

- NGOs in collaboration with parents and teachers should organize workshops and seminars to understand the concept and for successful implementation of inclusive classrooms.
- Also, programs should be conducted to sensitize the parents to understand that inclusive education can be for all types of learners and for the development of an inclusive, and a cohesive society. It should try to inculcate a positive attitude towards inclusive practices.

Self- help groups by Parents:

- Groups of parents should be formed to discuss ways to inculcate empathy, respect and generosity amongst the students by treating them the way they want and need to be treated.
- Vocational Education could be given a push with the expertise of parents in varied fields such that there is scope for inclusion.
- Networking with Community could help parents to accept their own child, understand the differences in the peers of their child, gather new ideas and ways to embrace diversity.

Collaboration of the parents with teachers and school management:

- Parents should be involved at all levels in deciding infrastructural, sports and cultural events, community-level programs giving them a feeling of belongingness.
- Inputs from parents about their child could help in better understanding of the needs of the child in the classroom.

Collaboration of school counsellors with the parents:

- Counsellors should work with families and peers to build positive relationships and enhance optimism. They should work with families to improve its ability to meet child's needs at home. This involve offering parents insight into strategies for behavior modification to improve child's performance.

Effective use of Media:

- Newsletters for parents should be published and circulated periodically giving information of inclusion. It could carry articles about latest updates about disabilities and ways to overcome it, some anecdotes about real life experiences about diversity, challenges faced in acceptance of any disability and success stories too.
- It could also give updates on latest assistive technology and how it can be procured and implemented.
- NGO's working with inclusion should be highlighted so that parents can benefit from these.
- Social media like FB, blogs can serve as a common and accessible platform for sharing and connecting of parents, teachers and all the stakeholders.

Conclusion:

Every parent wants one's child to be happy, and for this to happen, parents nowadays are sincerely taking efforts and are invested in the upbringing of the child.

I happen to see here, a similarity between photography and parenting; and to get a good picture, remember having read:

"It's not the camera, but who's behind the camera".

How true. It's the parent who is molding, holding the reins and standing rock solid behind the child and with the child. So, it is of utmost importance that the parent be mindful, aware, updated and with the best skills at hand to help the child. It's the parent who should hon his skills, keep abreast of ways and means of doing it, support the child in his endeavors and then wait for the picture to be perfect and frame worthy.

If the means and methods suggested by the researchers are followed by all the stake- holders, it would be possible to successfully attain Mindfulness in Parenting for Inclusive Education.

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