

Inclusive Education: Current Scenario in India

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“All children are born with potential and we cannot be sure of the learning limits of any child”

The 21st century is moving towards inclusion of all in all sphere of life. Hence to enable this to happen it becomes pertinent to be able to understand, accept and address diversities within the classroom. Every school class has diversities and the teachers have been trained to manage diversities but within a limited range. With the acceptance of disability as NOT a deficit but a variation, the ranges of diversities within the classroom are on the increase. This is because of the mandate to include more and more children who have diverse needs and often these needs may be what are termed as “hidden disabilities”. The , “hidden disabilities” which are most common include Specific Learning Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Mild Cerebral Palsy and Borderline Intellectual Disability.

Inclusion is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education.

It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. Complete inclusion in a regular school means were the child is completely an unified part of the existing educational scenario, hardly identifiable at the first glance. India has been working towards legalizing the acceptance of the child with disability through its Acts and Policies over the decades. Yet this has been slow. NCERT with the references of the documents framed by UNICEF has ultimately lead to the development of the National Curriculum Framework for school Education (2005), a contemporary guiding document for School Education in India.

Some of the contemporary developments in the recent decades that have shaped the concept of inclusion in India are:

- 2006: The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is adopted and ratified by India; however, they did not adopt or ratify the protocol. Article 24 of the Convention discusses the importance of inclusion.
- 2006: The National Policy for People with Disabilities changes special schools into resource centers for people with disabilities and teachers. It also attempts to bridge the service gap between rural and urban areas by creating more District Disability and Rehabilitation Centers.
- 2008: Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage (IEDSS) replacing the 1974 IEDC.

- 2009: The Right to Education Act, which was originally drafted in 2005, was not passed until 2009, and put into full effect in 2010. The supreme court upheld the constitutionality of the act in 2012. This act was not disability specific, but rather included people with disabilities.

An important issue that emerges even before one can begin to work towards inclusive education is collecting accurate data of the percentage of persons with disability in the country. Given below is the data from the Census and Surveys of different countries. A closer look would indicate that many of the developing or underdeveloped countries have lower level of disabilities as per their Census reports. This is probably not an accurate picture because probably their identifications processes are not clearly worked out. Also the public awareness of different disabilities as well as professional awareness of the various disabilities is not so high as in developed countries. Thus it can very clearly be concluded that the number of cases of disability tend to get very under-rated in under developed, developing countries.

Prevalence of disability in the different countries of the world					
<u>Censuses</u>			<u>Surveys</u>		
Country	Year	Percent of population with a disability	Country	Year	Percent of population with a disability
United States	2000	19.4	New Zealand	1996	20.0
Canada	2001	18.5	Australia	2000	20.0
Brazil	2000	14.5	Uruguay	1992	16.0
United Kingdom	1991	12.2	Spain	1986	15.0
Poland	1988	10.0	Austria	1986	14.4
Ethiopia	1984	3.8	Zambia	2006	13.1
Uganda	2001	3.5	Sweden	1988	12.1
Mali	1987	2.7	Ecuador	2005	12.1
Mexico	2000	2.3	Netherlands	1986	11.6
Botswana	1991	2.2	Nicaragua	2003	10.3
Chile	1992	2.2	Germany	1992	8.4
India	2001	2.1	China	1987	5.0
Colombia	1993	1.8	Italy	1994	5.0
Bangladesh	1982	0.8	Egypt	1996	4.4

Out of the under reported disability data by the Census of India, according to the World Bank Report (2007), in India 38 per cent of the children with disabilities in the age group 6-13 years are out of school and even for children attending school, the school attendance is never more than 70% for boys and 66% for girls.

Besides attempting to increase the enrollment of the children with disability in schools, their retention in schools and providing them meaningful education are imperative further steps. According to the India National Curriculum Framework 2005, the proposed guiding principles for curriculum development include connecting knowledge to life outside the school, ensuring that learning shifts away from rote methods, enriching curriculum so that it goes beyond textbooks and making examinations flexible

In continuum with the guiding principles the, India National Curriculum Framework 2005 has addressed the following questions

- What educational purposes should the schools seek to achieve?
- What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to achieve these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be meaningfully organized?
- How do we ensure that these educational purposes are indeed being accomplished?

NCF 2005 has attempted to develop a policy of inclusion. Some of the salient highlights which emphasis inclusion in the NCF 2005 are that Inclusive education is about embracing all and Disability is a social responsibility, which needs to be accepted by all.

Every child with a disability needs to be in school, hence there is to be no selection procedures to be adopted for denying admission to learners with disabilities. Once the child is in school it is the school's and society's responsibility to elicit the best possible potential of the child. This needs to work with the philosophy that it is not children who fail, but rather it is an indication of the failure of the school. Diversities need to be accepted and celebrated and a handicap is a social construct, hence handicap and handicapping situations need to be deconstructed. Which also implies that provisions need to be made and not restrictions imposed.

Further the enrollment and appropriate education of children with disability has been given a forward momentum by The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the constitutional legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.

The RTE mandates advocates free and compulsory education to all children from 6-14 years of age. The key objective of RTE- SSA is Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). This has given a new thrust to the education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN),

making free and compulsory elementary education a Fundamental Right , as without their inclusion, the objective of UEE cannot be achieved.

In conclusions the major road blocks that need to be addressed include

1. Scanty coverage of the addressed issue
2. Mismatch between
 - a. Expectations, policies and resources.
 - b. Actual educational needs and delivered plans
 - c. School and college curriculum with emphasis on inclusive practices
 - d. Teacher's pre-service and in-service training
 - e. Resource Development for teachers
 - f. Professionals abilities to differentiate between the diverse needs and responding strategies
3. Psychometric Evaluation
 - Validity and consistency in dealing with the reports.
4. Differential instructions Vs Differential Expectations
5. Framing of detail Provisions and recommendations for Primary and Middle Schools.