

Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education: A Major Concern for India in New Times

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Abstract

Fifteen to twenty years ago, regular education teachers had little or no preparation about to educate students with disabilities (D' Anzola and Giordano, 2006). In recent years, the movement of inclusion to include students with disabilities in regular education settings has reached to mass number of teachers and teacher educated and now it is also creating space in the communities. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 embodied the human rights for students with disabilities, stating that students with disabilities didn't want their future decided by others or limited according to their disabilities. They have the right to receive an education to develop their skills.

The Salamanca statement on Education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) and other international declarations emphasise the need for inclusive education as a strategy for achieving Education for All (Basir, 2006). The key role of teachers in giving birth and maintaining a truly inclusive classroom is unquestionable (Anderson, Klassen and Georgiou, 2007), but such an important mission also requires that suitable,

effective and barrier free educational means should be employed. Since inclusion requires new approaches to teaching and learning (Lacey, 2006), it is fundamental to give teachers appropriate advice and support to face these challenges. As India is home to nearly 30 million children with special needs, and 82.74 per cent out of which are enrolled in regular schools, it is more challenging to provide quality education to all of them.

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Students with Special Needs in India: Present Scenario

It is estimated that over 650 million people, 10 per cent of the world's population, have a disability. Eighty per cent live in developing countries (United Nations Human Rights, 2010). The 2001 census of India found 21.91 million people with disabilities (2.13 percent of the population), while the 2002 NSS round's disability estimate is 1.8 percent of the population. As for any other group, education is critical to expand the life prospects of people with disabilities. Disabled people have much lower educational attainment rates, with 52 per cent illiteracy against a 35 per cent average for the general population.

Report of the National Workshop on Inclusive Education in SSA (2008) states that 30.38 lakh CWSN were identified in 2006-07 as compared to 14.59 lakh CWSN identified in 2003-04. Similarly the enrolment of children with disabilities/CWSN in 2006-07 has gone up to 19.97 lakh, as compared to 11.71 lakh in 2003-04. The current coverage of children with disabilities is 21.86 lakh (71.99 per cent) thus leaving approximately 30 per cent of the identified children with disabilities out of the education circumference. So far in SSA, 1.70 million children with disabilities have been enrolled in regular schools (MHRD, 2007). This increasing enrolment of CWSN in regular schools brings a herculean task for the teachers, as they are bound to provide quality education to CWSN without any discrimination.

Equally, the share of disabled children who are out of school is around five and a half times the general rate and around four times even that of the ST population. In even the best performing major states, a significant share of out of school children are those with disabilities (in Kerala, 27 percent; in Tamil Nadu over 33 percent). Indeed, evidence from more advanced states demonstrates that Children with Disabilities (CWD) remain perhaps the most difficult group to bring into the educational net even where overall enrolments are very high. Across all levels of severity, CWD very rarely progress beyond primary school. This underlines the importance of getting CWD into school if India is to achieve the education Millennium Development Goals (Human Development Unit South Asia Region, 2009). Here also teacher has to lead from the front to achieve this challenging task.

Inclusive education is about embracing all.

- Disability is a social responsibility.
- No selection procedures to be adopted for denying admission to learners with disabilities.
- Children do not fail, they only indicate failure of the school.
- Accept difference and celebrate diversity.
- Inclusive is not confined to the disabled. It also means non-existence.
- Learn human rights and conquer human wrongs.
- Handicap is a social construct,

deconstruct handicap.

- Make provisions and not restrictions; adjust to the needs of the child.
- Remove physical, social and attitudinal barriers.
- Partnership is our strength such as:
 - School community; school teachers; teachers-children; children- children; teachers parents; school systems and outside system.
- All good practices of teaching are practices of inclusion.
- Learning together is beneficial for every child.
- Support services are essential services.
- If you want to teach, learn from the child. Identify his strengths and not limitations.
- Inculcate mutual respect and inter-dependence.

—NCF-2005: 84

Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education: Need of the Hour

Educating students with and without disabilities in the general classroom is becoming the current practice which is commonly known as inclusive education (Mukhopadhyay, Molosiwa and Moswela, 2009). Inclusive education is perceived to be one of the ways to increase educational access to large number of students with disabilities. This means more children with disabilities will be placed

in the regular classroom than before. In order to provide effective inclusive education for all students, teachers need to develop a different set of skills and knowledge than traditionally required by the profession. Given the complex nature of classrooms and the increasing demands on teachers, who often have little or no specialised training in working with (SWSN) structures should be set up to provide the necessary help and guidance for teachers to make changes in their instruction (Magg and Katsiyannis, 2000). With the increasing diversity among students in today's classrooms, teacher preparation programmes are increasingly called on to train teachers who are able to respond competently to the challenges of inclusive classrooms (Munby, Lock, Hutchinson, Whitehead, and Martin, 1999). A major part of responding to the diversity found inside the classroom is through effective and efficient teacher preparation. Further, training on student-centred pedagogy and other effective teaching strategies are not unique to inclusive education, nor are special education needs SEN students the only students who benefit from these approaches. In fact, these strategies are central to current training in general education and are essential for the academic success of all including SWSN and SEN learners (Singhal, 2006). Essentially, if a learner does not have the opportunity to experience effective teaching and learning, their present and future options are consequently put at-risk. To meet the challenges of inclusion, general education classroom teachers need to provide instruction that is

appropriate to a much wider range of student abilities than has previously been the case. Therefore, classroom teachers must be comfortable with and competent at adapting and modifying curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all of their students, including those students who have disabilities that affect their learning. Unfortunately, many teachers who are currently teaching in such classrooms have not been prepared to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis. Additionally, significant numbers of teacher training programmes have yet to adapt to these new challenges (Stanovich and Jordan, 2002). In this juncture teacher training programme for inclusion is of utmost importance and well trained skilful teachers are the immediate need of the schools.

United Nations Children's Fund (2003) made the following three important observations related to the prominence of teacher preparation for inclusive education;

1. Many schools have a large number of children in each classroom and few teachers. As a consequence of this, many teachers are reluctant to work with children with disabilities. They consider it an additional workload.
2. Training for sensitisation towards disability and inclusion issues, and how to converge efforts for effective implementation of programmes, they are important concerns.
3. The number of skilled and trained personnel for supporting inclusive practices is not adequate to meet the needs of different types of disability.

Rationale Behind Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education

Teacher education is a core element for building the capacity of the education system to do inclusion. Teacher's education is essential to implement the concept of inclusive education for the children with disabilities. Consequently it must be a priority to train all teachers in same way to enhance their skills and update their knowledge. Teachers can be benefited by the approach of inclusive education in various ways. Zerin (2005) mentions the following points in this regard:

- Inclusive education helps teachers appreciate the diversity of individual human being.
- It helps teachers recognise that all students have strengths;
- It creates an awareness of the importance of direct individualised instruction;
- It increases ways of creatively addressing challenges;
- It teaches collaborative problem solving skills;
- It develops teamwork skills;
- It acquires different ways of perceiving challenges as a result of being on a multi-disciplinary team;
- It enhances accountability skills;
- It combats monotony.

In Salamanca, Spain in 1994, more than 300 people representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations came together under the Spanish Government and UNESCO

organisation. The conference was about “Special Needs Education: Access and Quality”. In the final report (Salamanca statement) the Participants proclaim that

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning;
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs;
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs;
- Those with SEN must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs;
- Regular schools with this inclusive orientation 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. (UNESCO, 1994 part 2)

The Right to Education Act (2009) has brought ample pressure to the government to provide free and compulsory quality education to all children irrespective of any

discrimination. Schools across the country are moving toward more inclusive models of education and both pre-service and in-service teachers must be prepared to meet challenges of inclusion through a sound knowledge base and culturally responsive attitudes to teach in diversified and multicultural settings. Pre-service teacher candidates will most likely be placed in situations where they will teach in ways not only contradictory to their educational preparation, but to students who differ from them in language, culture, and experiences (Sobel and Taylor, 2005). These teacher candidates crave authentic real-world experiences about how to implement inclusive teaching practices. They need explicit modelling and demonstrations of how to accommodate instruction for diverse learners and more guided exposure to realities and perspectives different from their own.

Schumm and Vaughn (1995) and Baker and Zigmond (1995) observed that increasing numbers of CWSN are being served in regular classrooms which are dramatically changing the way special education services are being provided in schools. They stressed that this development must be addressed in pre-service teacher education programmes so that the next generation of educators will be better prepared to work more efficiently and effectively. Therefore, the importance of changing the traditional ways of teaching in regular classrooms cannot be overemphasised. Given the complex nature of classrooms and the increasing demands on teachers, who often have little or no specialised

training in working with exceptional students, structures should be set up to provide the necessary help and guidance for teachers to make changes in their instruction (Magg and Katsiyannis, 2000).

With the increasing diversity among children in today's classrooms, teacher preparation programmes are increasingly called onto train teachers who are able to respond competently to the challenges of inclusive classrooms (Munby, Lock, Hutchinson, Whitehead, and Martin, 1999). A major part of responding to the diversity found inside the classroom is through effective and efficient teacher preparation.

Johnson and Hawkins (2008) stated in a study that teachers reported a high percentage of CWSN in their classrooms who had a wide range of disabilities. They revealed a grave concern pertaining to the lack of support services available to the students and themselves, and disclosed a perceived inability to provide optimal educational programmes to CWSN because of inadequate teacher preparation and lack of adequate resources.

What and How to Prepare Teachers for Inclusion?

The training of general teachers at pre-service and in-service levels should address the issue of education of children with disabilities, so that teachers are better equipped to work in an inclusive environment. Some of the issues in training that need to be addressed include the methodology to be adopted for identifying children with disabilities; classroom

management; use of appropriate teaching methodologies; skills for adapting the curriculum; development of teaching-learning materials that are multi-sensory in nature; evaluation of learning; etc. Central/State departments of education, local educational districts, and colleges and universities must provide high quality pre-service and continuing professional development experiences that prepare all general educators to work effectively with children, youth and young adults representing a wide range of abilities and disabilities, experiences, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, attitudes and expectations.

Kamens, Loprete and Slostad (2000) advocated for the following points to be included in the curriculum for teacher preparation for inclusive education:

Behavioural Concerns: In order to facilitate successful inclusion, pre-service teachers need to be prepared to deal with behaviour problems. Teachers seem to be concerned about how to maintain order and meet the emotional and social needs of all of the students. The following topics should be included in the course;

(a) helping each child to deal with frustration, (b) facilitating self-concept and self-esteem, and (c) maintaining consistency in expectations.

Identification of Students with Special Needs: Teaching programme should make general education teachers to identify students with special needs and understand the characteristics inherent in the legal classifications of disabilities. An understanding of the characteristics of such classifications

would help them to comprehend how to more effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Adaptation of Curriculum and Materials: Teachers should learn methods to adapt materials, lessons, and assessments to meet the needs of special education students. Prospective teachers need to be prepared for (a) teaching students at the appropriate instructional level, (b) using alternative curriculum and assessment techniques and (c) modifying lessons and assessments for students with disabilities. This may indicate the need for teachers to adjust expectations, standards, and assessment techniques to accommodate students who are included in general education classrooms.

Adaptation of Instructional Strategies : In addition to adapting curriculum and materials, pre-service teachers should have a wealth of strategies and techniques for adapting instruction. The needs of all children should be made through a variety of approaches, such as cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, and learning styles. Pre-service teachers need to know how to monitor and adjust lessons to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Prospective teachers would benefit from learning how to individualise instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Legal Regulations and Individualised Education Programmes (IEPs): There is a need for prospective teachers to know the legal regulations governing special education. The importance of knowledge of legal terminology and procedures, including the IEP process

should be introduced to the teachers.

Co-teaching, Teaming, and Collaboration: There is a need for prospective teachers to be prepared to work with others. Pre-service teachers need to learn how to communicate effectively with the special teachers, work and plan with other professionals in the classroom, and co-teach with special education teachers. They need to foster a positive attitude about working with others by listing the need for a “spirit of cooperation”.

Besides all the above mentioned points, Zerlin (2005) advocated following competences as the needs of the teachers for fruitful inclusive education:

Practical and Functional Competences

- Creating a learning environment in which learners challenge stereotypes about language, disability, race, gender, ethnicity, cultural, and geographical location;
- Undertaking analyses of barriers to learning and participation in the local schooling context;
- Creating an environment in which all learners are equally valued;
- Developing strategies, through the curriculum, to build students’ self-esteem;
- Creating lesson plans that are responsive to student diversity;
- Developing resources to support learning and participation;
- Managing various approaches

to teaching such as group work, collaborative learning, individualised learning, peer-mediated learning, in different educational contexts and with diverse groups of learners;

- Working with other peers in participative decision-making and collaborative teaching with the aim of maximising the participation of all learners
- Creating an inclusive ethos in the school where all learners, staff, parents and community members are valued;
- Promoting and supporting innovative practices in order to improve the school's responsiveness to diversity;

Foundational Competences

- Understanding the philosophy and assumptions regarding inclusive education policy and practices;
- Understanding current legislation and policy with respect to the management of inclusive education;
- Understanding the nature of barriers to learning and participation, and the principles underlying different strategies that can be used to address them;
- Understanding the nature of diversity in schools and communities;
- Understanding the assumptions that underlie a range of assessment approaches, and

their particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to learner diversity;

- Understanding that inclusion is concerned with increasing the participation of all students who are vulnerable to exclusion, not just those with disabilities;
- Understanding various approaches to managing classrooms in order to ensure that they are responsive to diversity;
- Understanding approaches to conflict resolution, problem-solving, and mediation;
- Understanding and engaging with current research on inclusive education in order to promote an inclusive culture in the school;

Reflexive and Spontaneous Competences

- Reflecting on the extent to which objectives of the learning experience have been achieved and deciding on adaptations where necessary;
- Reflecting on how language, disability, race, gender, ethnicity, culture, geographical location and other differences impact on learning, and making appropriate adaptations to teaching strategies;
- Reflecting on whether children are actively involved in their own learning, and developing strategies to maximise participation for all learners;
- Reflecting on all skills learners bring to the class and making it explicit that all skills are valued, not merely academic skills;

- Reflecting on and interpreting assessment results, and feeding these into processes for the improvement of learning programmes;
- Reflecting on whether there are any exclusionary practices in the ethos and culture of the school, and developing strategies to address them;
- Reflecting on strategies to assist teachers in working collaboratively to develop inclusive curricula; and
- Reflecting on the effectiveness of staff development programmes, and finding ways to ensure that they meet the needs in the school context.

Suggestions for Successful Teacher Preparation Programme for Inclusion

Orientation training of policy-makers and education department officials, both at the state and block level is essential. In addition, there is a need to develop on-site support systems for teachers. Grassroots workers, parents, special school teachers, para-teachers and other individuals can be shown how to provide the required support.

The existing handful of teacher trainers cannot reach to the vast number of teachers working with children with disabilities in rural/remote areas. There is a need to explore alternatives such as training para-teachers, investing in pilot studies to develop tele-rehabilitation programmes, and exploring strategies for distance education. Pre-service

teachers argue that teacher preparation programmes devote too much attention to theory and not enough to the practical skills of teaching. These teachers leave their teacher preparation with an understanding of the democratic purposes of education, learning theory, a curricular vision and a basic repertoire of teaching strategies. However, they often need support drawing on this foundational knowledge to plan and implement curriculum within their particular classrooms (Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko, 2006). Pre-service teacher education programmes and school districts must collaborate to ensure that instruction is based on the use of research-based methodologies and learning theories that would support students' learning; thereby honouring culturally diverse and creative classrooms with teachable and sustainable moments.

Conclusion

Teacher development is at the heart of initiatives for inclusive practices in the schools (Ainscow, 2003). Though regular classroom teachers are willing to take responsibility of all children, including those with special needs, they will not be confident if they are not equipped with necessary skills (Gafoor and Asaraf, 2009). Further, inclusion requires the ability to deal with diversities and make use of them for the education of all using a variety of instructional strategies. The success of inclusive education is dependent in part on the mainstream teachers' perceptions of special need children and educability of these students and on

the extent of their willingness to make adaptations to accommodate individual differences. If teachers responsible for inclusive teacher practices have unclear perceptions of their role, it may seriously undermine the efforts in maintenance and restructuring of the programmes towards inclusion (Jelas, 2000). In order to consider about the responsibility of teacher education for inclusion, the designers and implementers of teacher education (i.e. the universities) are required to understand with great accuracy and depth the notion of inclusion, and accordingly design and implement a curriculum for training all teachers throughout the country.

In conclusion, with the philosophical orientation of today's educational system, every classroom should include students with diverse needs and every teacher should be required to meet the needs of these students. This necessitates that teachers have confidence in their abilities, knowledge and skills in inclusive education to meet the individual challenges that they may encounter in the present school climate (Johnson and Hawkins, 2008). Teacher education reform view of preparing future teachers for inclusive education needs serious attention and efforts, if we want to achieve the goal as inclusive classrooms, inclusive schools and ultimately inclusive society.

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