

## Collaboration in Inclusive Education

Bharti\*

The rapidly changing education scenario in India facilitated by implementation of Right to Education Act-2009 is making Indian classroom more and more diverse in terms of students needs. More and more classrooms are now witnessing the presence of children with disabilities. As a result of efforts under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan* (SSA), enrolment and retention of children with special needs up to elementary level has also increased there by adding to the existing diversity in the classroom. Managing the teaching-learning of children with special needs within the same classroom along with their non-disabled peers is becoming a challenge for the regular teachers due to a number of reasons. The foremost of them is the lack of training in inclusive education practices. Realising this as a challenge the various policies and programmes of Government of India like SSA and *Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha*

*Abhiyaan* (RMSA) have attempted to meet this challenge by organising a large number of in-service teacher training programmes and also by recruiting special education teachers. The efforts of the Government though effective, however are just like a drop in the ocean due to the huge number of regular teachers as well as identified children with disabilities.

In this scenario, the need of the hour is to encourage collaborative work culture at the level of school so that the children with special needs remain primary responsibility of regular teachers, instead of merely referred to special education teachers who are attached with the school in itinerant mode.

The present paper, explores possibilities of collaboration in inclusive schools at all levels like children, teachers and administrative functionaries in the schools. Various strategies for promoting collaboration have also been discussed in this paper.

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## Understanding Collaboration

Collaboration is that style of working in which two or more professionals/functionaries work together towards achieving the common aim. Together they share ideas, develop plans, implement plans and also evaluate the outcomes. True collaboration occurs when all members of collaborating team feel equally valued, goals are clear to all, decision making is shared and each one is accepted for their share of work and style.

At the level of school, collaboration in implementing inclusive education would mean regular education of teachers, special education teachers, educational administrators, students (both challenged as well as non-challenged), parents and para-professionals working as a team to achieve the common aim of providing quality education to the children.

## Why Collaboration is Needed in Inclusive Classroom?

The experience of educating Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in regular schools under SSA and RMSA has revealed that the CWSN are physically included, that is, they are sitting in the same classroom but do not feel involved in the teaching-learning activities as the regular teacher doesn't have any orientation or training in taking care of CWSN in the classroom along with their non-CWSN peers. This requires the skill of treating the entire group of children as one without diluting the interventions for managing special needs. Unfortunately the regular

teachers though trained in teaching children lack the knowledge and skill of implementing inclusive teaching-learning practices. He/she requires knowledge and awareness about the inclusive education practices and handholding by the resource teacher.

Education of CWSN in regular classroom involves efforts from a number of persons simultaneously that is:

- Regular teachers to make the child learn reading, writing mathematics, science, etc,
- Special education inputs provided by special teachers for understanding the modalities of curriculum adaptation, task analysis revisions, repeated practices, behaviour modification and learning daily life skills.
- Therapeutic service provided by para-professionals to help in speech, mobility, etc.
- Administrators to maintain the availability of required services and resources.
- Policy planners to provide the required flexibility in the implementation of policies so that schooling becomes comfortable for CWSN.
- Resources (like resource room) required are often present at some other physical location and therefore require collaboration between different schools/institutions.
- The CWSN and children without special needs should have feeling of mutual acceptance and respect

and one group should not make fun or bully the other.

The experiences mentioned above indicate that in order to be successful in educating CWSN in inclusive classroom efforts from a number of different professionals are necessary. The same is not possible unless collaborative work culture is emphasised and strategies for the same are advocated.

### **Benefits of Collaboration in Indian School System**

At the moment the experience of a number of educational capacity building programme both at the SSA and RMSA level organised by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and other institutions like National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), indicate huge gap between required and available number of special education teachers. This issue can be tackled if the special education teachers are deployed judiciously and also with slightly altered nature of work both for the regular as well as special education teachers. In collaborative work settings, the special education teachers instead of working at the level of individual student take the role of Key Resource Person (KRP) for a cluster of schools. The main duty of KRP would be to help the regular teachers in

- Identifying the special needs
- Develop inclusive education plan
- Implement the plan.

Apart from this the KRP would be expected to mentor and handhold the regular teachers in implementing the inclusive education practices. Remember, the regular teachers may or may not have the knowledge and awareness to implement the inclusive education practices. The handholding and ready availability of resource person as and when required will also aid in sustaining the motivation of teachers struggling to take care of special needs during curriculum transaction (subject teaching). This will reduce the demand of physical availability of special education teachers in the school on daily basis.

### **Characteristics of collaboration**

The major feature of collaborative work culture is envisaging a common goal. In the case of inclusive education the common goal may be to provide quality education to all children. The underlying assumptions for realising this common goal would be to accept each and every child enrolled in the school and to have faith in his/her capacity of learning and achieving.

Collaborative work culture also demands that each and every member of the team should be considered to be equally valuable. Each member's contribution is essential for realising the common goal. The contribution of resource teacher in acting as guide and mentor to the regular teacher cannot be valued more than the work of regular teacher who is transacting the curriculum, motivating each child to learn and achieve, and is

also taking care of the special needs of children.

Another important practice of collaborative work culture is shared decision-making. When decisions are taken jointly the responsibility for outcomes also gets equally distributed. The achievements, academic and others related to daily living skills of children with special needs provides sense of achievement equally to all members of the team. Similarly, the decisions failing to deliver the desired results are also viewed as joint responsibility. The accountability is of all the members of the collaborating team.

The resources required for realising the common goal are also collected and pooled. Each member has equal access to the resources as and when required. The collaborative work culture values contribution and rights of each member of the team.

### **Pre-requisite for Collaboration**

The collaborative work requires *sharing* of not only ideas by each member of the team, but also of the work plans, resources, responsibilities and outcomes. Open *communication* among the team members is another key requirement for success in collaborative efforts. The effective communication skills like listening, non-verbal signals, asking questions, conducting effective meetings, responding to resistance, resolving conflicts, persuading others etc., are assets for achieving success. *Supportive environment* indicates sensitising administrative staff,

support staff, para-professional and teachers towards the significance of the collaborative efforts. Making each one a part of the team and eliciting required support to ensure smooth implementation of the plan/intervention. Working in collaboration might be a new style of work for teachers and administrators who are used to work either independently or in subordination, hence *training in collaboration* of all the members like support staff, teachers both regular as well as special education, administrative staff etc. is necessary. This training may also make an attempt towards resolving administrative hierarchies; say for example a teacher not only listening but also appreciating the suggestions of *ayah*.

### **Steps for Shared Problem-solving or Working in Collaboration**

*Discovering a shared need* or a common goal is identified which affect each member of the team. This involves not only pinpointing the need but also to mention the same in clear objective statement(s). An example of the same could be “Educating Rohit, a child with speech impairments studying in class three, in inclusive classroom”. Once the common or shared need is identified the next logical step is to *identify obstacle and hurdles* which may prevent the desired outcome. In the example above the obstacle may be “Rohit is not able to express his ideas and feelings due to speech problems, this makes it difficult to involve him in discussions and debates, seeking

verbal replies, obtaining his inputs during classroom and assessing how much he has understood.” Mentioning obstacles and hurdles in this fashion indicates acceptance of the situation/ disability and listing the hurdles that the problem at hand is involving Rohit in discussion and seeking his response. Next task is to *brainstorm the possible solutions* by involving each member of the team. This may lead to listing of a number of ideas for example inviting family members to act as interpreter, planning teaching-learning requiring minimum verbal interaction, written expression, sign language, cued speech (Speech clubbed with signs or vice versa) study buddy etc. The ideas of each member is valued and placed before the house for wider discussion. This will make each member feel valued and appreciated for their contribution. The pros and cons of each idea are discussed at length and *each idea is evaluated* for its practicability, implementation, resources required, ease of implementation, possible threats, degree of effectness etc. This is the step which will lead to choosing one solution out of the many listed or for developing new strategy by merging various ideas. For example, in case of Rohit, a peer may be encouraged to learn sign language and till then the teaching-learning may be planned carefully so that verbal inputs from him may be sought via writing or action/ signs clubbed with writing. During the days of unavoidable debates or discussions family members may be

involved for interpreting his expression through sign language and facilitating his participation in the classroom.

Once a possible solution is finalised and agreed upon by everyone, the time is to list the requirements and pool in the resources to meet the requirements. This is also the time to develop *action plan with specific details* assigning roles and responsibilities. In case of Rohit the very first action would be to identify a peer who would like to volunteer for learning the sign language and act as interpreter, next task is to arrange for his/her training in sign language along with Rohit. Simultaneously, the subject teachers should be encouraged to modify teaching-learning activities so that verbal inputs from the child is minimised, for situations requiring responses in yes or no signs like nodding the head or raising coloured paper cards can be tried. If time line is also mentioned against each action point this makes the planning more effective and easy for implementation.

Now comes the time for *implementing the plan* i.e., putting into practice the strategies or the action plan decided in above step. The implementation phase also brings to forefront various issues and concerns which may not have been realised during the process of planning till now. In the case of Rohit subject teachers may also require training in modifying the teaching-learning strategies so that Rohit also feels part of the process. After implementing the plans for pre-decided duration, comes the time to *evaluate the outcomes*. This

should not be left to the end rather should be done regularly along with the implementation, so that if there is need the action plan may be changed accordingly.

### **Models of Collaborative Teaching**

**One teacher and one support**—the regular teacher teaches with support from special education teacher. This model looks at the special education teacher as the person providing support from outside the class. He/she may not be required to work with the child in one to one setting. The curriculum transaction strategies are discussed and planned collaboratively and the regular teacher is the main functionary in the classroom, the special educator acts as scaffolding. The special education teacher also acts as mediator between various other stakeholders like para-professionals, support staff, parents and peers.

**Station teaching**—the entire class is divided into two groups based on the need of intervention for a particular subject. For example in Rohit's class, there might be other children who require help for self-expression during paragraph writing, for arranging their thought in logical sequence or generating ideas. These children may be grouped together and either the regular or the special teacher may provide the necessary inputs depending on their ease and comfort. This way the class tackles different levels of learning simultaneously. Everybody is part of the teaching-learning process.

**Parallel teaching**—the entire class is divided into two groups just like station teaching above and instead of having both the groups work together on different levels of the same topic or subject, different skills or subjects or topics are simultaneously dealt by two teachers in the two groups. This might be useful for remedial classes or for inculcating study habits or learning daily living skills. This might be understood as two parallel groups working at the same time. This can be compared to children of the same class attending art or music or drawing classes at the same time depending on their choice of subject. The difference here lies in the basis of group formation; the grouping is based on the learning needs and special needs of children in the classroom.

**Alternative teaching design**—In this model, one teacher teaches and another teacher re-teaches small group of students who are facing difficulty with content. Math is one subject which is highly compatible with this design due to its nature. Children require varying degree of practice before mastering a concept. Similarly, this may be tried for other subjects. For example, while teaching environmental science in class 3 some children may require re-teaching the sources of water.

**Case by case**—Students with special needs/challenges present in particular classes remains primarily the responsibility of the regular teacher. Each child's case is closely monitored

by both the special education resource teacher as well as the general teacher. The interventions are also decided case by case.

**Adaptive Learning Environments Model**-(ALEM-Wang, Rubenstein, and Reynolds in 1985). This model advocates creation of such learning environments in the schools where all students can learn basic academic skills irrespective of their challenges and thereby feel confident about their own abilities to cope with the social and intellectual demands of school. ALEM blends prescribed learning as in a curriculum, with the scope of experimenting with increasing flexibility within the system so that the schools' capabilities to accommodate individual learning needs are enhanced. Educational intervention is individually planned, and each student is expected to progress through the curriculum at his or her own pace.

**Team Teaching**- (Elliott and Mc Kenney). In this model the general education and special education teachers collaborate and teach all students in inclusive class as partners. Most of the special education services are provided on a pull-out basis (both for students and teachers) the concept of team teaching needs to be carefully thought out and collaboratively pre-planned so that the need for pulling out a child with special needs is minimised. Both teachers are responsible for instructional planning and delivery, student achievement, assessment and discipline.

**Strategies Intervention Model (SIM)**-This model was developed at the University of Kansas, Centre for Research on Learning. The model is based on the assumption that all students should develop their potential as independent and strategic learners. In simple terms, each one should be able to devise a plan for self-learning and problem-solving. This plan or strategy should function in harmony with various aspects of life like curriculum, social, motivational and executive domains. In response to the demands and expectations of the curriculum the students are taught learning strategies for acquiring, storing and expressing content objectives. The collaboration occurs between the special educator and regular teacher and curriculum planners.

**Circle of Inclusion**-This model is primarily used in the education of very young children (birth to age eight). It facilitates child's smooth transition from one stage of schooling to other and also from one social environment to another. Frequent meetings involving child's teacher(s), parent(s), medical and/or psychological practitioner(s), therapists, helpers/carers and others who may be instrumental in implementing the child's IEP (Individual Education Plans) are held to review the progress and needs of each child in a Circle of Inclusion classroom.

**Consultant Model**-The special teacher/resource teacher is made available to re-teach a difficult skill

or to help the student practice a newly acquired skill. This is a non-intrusive approach that provides the special needs students with at least two teachers to ask for help with curriculum related problems.

**Teaming Model**–The special teacher is assigned to one class with one planning period per week for the team of teachers teaching that particular class. The special teacher provides student information, possible instructional strategies, modification ideas for assignments/tests, and behaviour strategies. The teachers acting as team meet on a regular basis, establishing consistent communication among the team members. The team members are encouraged to work in close collaboration with lots of mutual handholding instead of working independently to achieve success with their students.

**Pilot programmes leading to phase in**– Here inclusion is practiced as a short term project, by those staff members who are interested in and/or willing to try inclusion. These members usually try out their ideas for a specified period of time. The approach tried on short term basis gradually becomes an integral part of the overall school programme. It is often implemented into specific subjects. The positive side is that slowly it will become a component of the school's programmes and through exposure students as well as teachers will become comfortable working together.

**Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS)**– A

special teacher meets regularly with general teachers to provide indirect support in the form of guidance in planning lessons/units to include differentiated instruction, to suggest accommodations and modifications for individual students, and to monitor student progress. The special teacher helps address teacher concerns, and assists teachers in adapting the curriculum, accommodating special needs in teaching-learning process, maintaining the pace of instruction in an inclusive classroom. The regular teacher is primarily responsible for developing and maintaining students' Individualised Education Plans (IEP) with the support from resource teacher.

### Conclusion

The initiatives taken by the state and central governments under SSA and RMSA for implementation of inclusive education practices and providing quality educational intervention to the CWSN in the nearby regular schools has started showing fruits as the enrolment and retention of CWSN at the primary level of schooling has shown improvement. However, the next step is to sensitise the regular teachers towards CWSN and enabling them to plan and execute the planned interventions with the help of resource special education teacher. This appears to be a bit difficult at the moment but can be attempted by following any of the models of collaborative teaching mentioned above on a pilot or experimental basis.



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## TO THE CONTRIBUTORS

*The Primary Teacher* invites you to write articles, field notes and reports for publication. We want your honest deliberations on issues that impact elementary education. You may like to focus on issues that bother you and concerns that you are sensitive to and which you feel should be shared with other teachers working at the grassroots levels.

- Use simple and non-technical language.
- Write in a friendly and communicative tone.
- Each article should be about 1500 to 3000 words.
- Keeping the clientele in mind, which is the teacher, please include information pieces that the teacher may not have access to in her/his place of location. You may include field notes and your own perceptions about issues in research, development and training in the area of elementary education.
- Send two copies of the piece along with the soft copy.
- Each article should also have a short abstract in about 150 words.
- Try to write in a magazine/story/narrative format to make the piece user-friendly and interesting to read.
- Please send photographs and illustrations with due acknowledgements, wherever necessary, to be incorporated in your article.

### MY PAGE...

This column would contain your letters and feedback where you can put forward your responses, suggestions and expectations from the articles, papers and columns presented in *The Primary Teacher*. You may have issues, concerns and doubts related to teaching-learning processes, classroom practices, syllabus, textbooks, evaluation patterns, research pursuits, etc. These could also reflect the concerns of many others working in this area. Please feel free to raise these issues in this column. You could also ask specific questions that would have baffled you.

You may write to us at the following address/email:

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