Prospects of Inclusive education in India

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Abstract
Inclusive education “is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It involves restructuring the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their locality.” For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers, and other students, are positive towards students with disabilities. Despite the promotion of inclusive education, govt. documents focus on inclusive education as being about including children with disabilities in the education system, but not specifically the mainstream. However, inclusion in the education system is not the same as inclusion in the mainstream. It is however arguable that special education is in fact regarded as superior in India due to its preferred status and that it is inclusion in the mainstream that is currently seen as the resource – constrained inferior alternative. The education paves foundation for the growth and development of the children. The children with special needs skip milestones of development due to their disabilities and misses out important experience thus developing secondary handicaps. The author focuses upon compensating these gaps with an optimistic motion for successful inclusion

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Children With Special Needs (CWSN), Curriculum Adaptation, Role Of Teachers, Parents In Educating CWSN, Education System

1 Introduction
Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their ability level, are included in a mainstream classroom, or in the most appropriate or least restrictive environment (LRE), that
students of all ability levels are taught as equals, and that teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students benefit. This also avoids wasting resources, and “shattered hopes,” which often occurs in classrooms that are “one size fits all. Studies have shown that systems that are truly inclusive reduce drop-out rates and repetition of grades, and have higher average levels of achievement, compared to systems that are not inclusive. People who believe in inclusive education believe that the education system is the impediment to learning for a child, and that every child is capable of learning.

Inclusion is not a new concept to India; we had been including children with disabilities in the mainstream education unknowingly and were supporting them with common sense methods. That is the reason we see good number of people with disabilities included naturally in the society every here and there. As far as India is concerned, the general education itself had and still has innumerable problems such as poverty, child labour, gender bias etc. The teachers were ready to take up challenges, maintained good rapport with the community and had a say in the village. Those who enter into the stream of education were groomed irrespective of their personal, social, economical and psychological limitations by the teachers. Each student of a teacher in a rural area was different from the other. The teacher had to practice different strategies to encourage, educate and retain the students in the system of education. They practised holistic approach to ensure all round development. It is surprising to note that we ought to speak a lot about inclusive education in India.

2 Conceptual understandings of Inclusive Education in India

Although it may not be appropriate to judge the adoption of a northern concept in the south from a northern perspective, hasty use of such globalised terminology without engaging with the thinking behind it may present no more than empty rhetoric, whatever the context. Singal (2005a: 9) clearly perceives inclusive education as “…a concept that has been adopted from the international discourse, but has not been engaged with in the Indian scenario.” She supports this view of lack of conceptual engagement through data collected in semi-structured interviews for her PhD research, where she found that:

Many interviewees concurred with the opinions reflected in government documents that inclusion is about children with special needs, as reflected by a disabling condition. A handful of others argue that inclusive education should not be limited to children with disabilities, as it holds relevance for all marginalised groups. Though they were quick to accept that this thinking has not yet prevailed. (Singal, 2005a: 5).

Indian understandings of disability and educational needs are demonstrated through the interchangeable use of several English terms which hold different meanings in the north. For example, children with special needs or special educational needs tend to be perceived as children with disabilities in India, as demonstrated by Mukhopadhyay and Mani’s (2002) chapter on ‘Education of Children with Special Needs’ in a NIEPA government-funded research report, which solely pertains to children with disabilities. In contrast, the intention of Mary Warnock’s term ‘special educational needs’, coined in the UK in 1978, was to imply that any child, with an impairment or not, may have an individual educational need at some point in their school career (e.g.
dyslexia, or language of instruction as a second language) which the teacher should adapt to. This further implies that a child with a disability may not have a special educational need while their able-bodied peers could (Giffard-Lindsay, 2006).

In addition, despite the 1987 Mental Health Act finally separating the meaning of learning disability from that of mental illness in India, there is still some confusion in understanding, with the 1995 Persons with Disabilities Act listing both mental retardation and mental illness as categories of disability (Thomas, 2005b). Ignorance and fear of genetic inheritance adds to the societal stigma of both. ‘Inclusive’ and ‘integrated’ education are also concepts that are used interchangeably (Julka, 2005; Singal, 2005a), understood as the placement of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, with the provision of aids and appliances, and specialist training for the teacher on how to ‘deal with’ students with disabilities. There is little engagement with the connotations of school, curriculum, and teacher flexibility for all children. These rigid, categorical interpretations of subtly different northern concepts are perhaps a reflection of not only the government tendency to categorise and label (Julka, 2005; Singal, 2005a) but also a cultural one, most explicitly enforced through the rigidly categorised caste system.

While it is easy to criticise the apparent lack of critical engagement with these terms in India, this is perhaps a reflection of the weakness of local disabled people’s organisations’ (DPOs) political voice which have had such an overt influence on the development of these concepts in the north. It may also reflect an unwillingness to engage with an understanding of social exclusion and the, “…barriers to entry and participation in the education system faced by children due to reasons other than impairment” (Singal, 2005b: 335). However, it is worth noting that this political discourse has a 40 year plus history in the north, while it is relatively new in the south.

### 3 Need of Flexible Inclusive education

As a system, inclusive education should be flexible. Its principle should be education in the regular classroom whenever possible. This need for flexibility must be reflected in the methods and materials used to give these children the widest possible access to the regular curriculum. When discussing the kind of service needed, the starting point should always be what is best for the particular child. Emphasizing inclusive education does not rule out special schools or centers. They would still be required to cater to children with profound and complex difficulties in need of more specialized and extensive help, including e.g. many deaf children. This alternative should, however, not be considered, unless classroom placement cannot meet their needs.

In line with the new policy of inclusive education, special schools begin to function more and more as resource centers. They involve in outreach programmes, where they draw on their vast experience and knowledge. They link their activities with those of the regular schools, the families, and the communities. Inclusive education services allow children with disabilities to stay with their family and to go to the nearest school, just like all other children. This circumstance is of vital importance to their personal development. Interrupting a disabled child's normal development may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself. In this context, it is important to stress the role parents have. They have a right to be involved in all decision-making concerning their child. They should be
seen as partners in the education process. Where there is such co-operation, parents have been found to be very important resources for the teachers and the schools.

As a rule, there are a number of practical problems that have to be solved before a child with special educational needs can go to school or take part in school activities. The arrangements it takes are fairly simple, provided coordinated local and unconventional initiatives are stimulated. One should also remember that the child's schoolmates represent a valuable potential partner who is ready and able to help in overcoming some of these problems. School reform needed which facilitating learning of every child.

Table 1.: Different educational practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Approach</th>
<th>Inclusive Approach</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education for some</td>
<td>Education for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective teaching</td>
<td>Individualized Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in segregated areas</td>
<td>Learning in Integrated areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on teaching subject-orientated</td>
<td>Emphasis on learning child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic / prescriptive</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities limited by exclusion</td>
<td>Equalizations of opportunities for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability view</td>
<td>Curricular view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labels children disability wise</td>
<td>Planning is made on ability levels and opposes all kinds of labeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Inclusion a holistic vision

Any child may experience a special need during the course of educational years (UNESCO). Some children feel 'left-outs' and never enter school or enter only for a few years and, as repeaters, become 'drop-outs' or, more correctly 'pushed-outs', without their needs having been met. These children are a vivid illustration of the failure of schools to teach rather than the pupils' failure to learn. A school system emphasizing Education for All should ensure the right of all children to a meaningful education based on individual needs and abilities. (Ture Johnson 2002). The regular schools will now increasingly play a major role in making provision for children with special educational needs available nation-wide. Making the school system flexible and adopting an inclusive approach may, however, prove the most challenging task of all, a task calling for deep reflection and discussion of the two fundamental questions: "What is the overall role of education", and "What is it we want
It might lead to the need of reforming the school system as a whole from a traditional, examination-oriented to an inclusive, child-oriented approach.

4 Gaps in the education system in India

We have seen progress in governmental policies that point towards efforts of inclusion in mainstream education in India. However, the current statistics and literature point to an entirely different situation on the ground. Well-intentioned policy makers are having issues with the implementation of their policies. It has been examined why students dropped out of mainstream schools in India before enrolling in a particular special school. There were many reasons identified. Students repeatedly failed their courses and were asked to leave by teachers or administrators, and many of these students were teased for their “failure.” Many students said that the teachers at their old school would erase lessons off of the board before students were finished copying them. Other students said they were never moved up beyond nursery level classes, and found it embarrassing to be in lower classes with children younger than them. Students were often isolated in class, or said they had no friends at school. Many were hyperactive or had behavior issues and were asked to leave. All of these reasons point to deficiencies not in the students, but in the education system’s lack of accommodation and inclusion. Teachers and administrators are not trained in inclusive teaching, and it is directly reflected in the educational achievement of the students, especially those who are considered “marginalized.” A study done of private and governmental principals showed that merely 37% of them had heard of inclusive schooling; there was no follow-up inquiring about who was well-versed in the subject. But individual administrators and teachers are not to blame for larger faults in the system. There is also a knowledge gap within the government. Most “higher up” policy makers, planners and administrators have heard of inclusion, but they do not know about the specific, technicalities of provisions in their own country.

Responsibility for teacher training is split between the rehabilitation council of India, who is responsible for the training of special education teachers, and The Ministry of Human Resource Development, who is responsible for general education teacher training. A split between the types of teacher training does not promote inclusion at all; just as there should be one ministry who is responsible for training all teachers in inclusive education.

Since the RCI Act of 1992, which set standards for teacher training, there has been a shortage of trained teachers and personnel in schools. Although recent studies have not been done regarding teacher training, pointing to yet another need in the system, one was done in the 1980s under the Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED). They researched what kind of teacher training was required to teach children with “mild,” “moderate” and “severe” disabilities. The differences between these disabilities were not defined in the texts cited.

Researchers found that about 45% of children with disabilities can be taught in a mainstream classroom by teachers with one week of training about inclusion. These children are those with extremely “mild” disabilities. 30% of children with disabilities can be taught in a mainstream classroom with teachers trained in inclusion for 1-2 weeks, plus periodic counseling or outside
services. These children have “mild to moderate” disabilities. 15% of children with disabilities can be taught in an inclusive setting with teachers who have about three months of training. These students will also need “resource assistance” including corrective aids and periodicals in different formats. This group of students has “moderate to severe” disabilities. The study ends with 10% of children with disabilities, who require special teachers or one-on-one aids. These are children with “severe” disabilities.

Curriculum is another area that is segregated between people with and without disabilities. Inflexible syllabi in a fiercely competitive exam oriented system, with high pressure on both students and teachers to perform, results in less than ideal circumstances for accommodating people with disabilities. There are two main types of curriculum in India: plus curriculum, specifically designed for children with disabilities, to increase accessibility (e.g. braille, large print, reading aids, language/communication for deaf children, communication for children with cerebral palsey), and general curriculum. The general curriculum needs to be adapted to the different formats that the plus curriculum is available in to make it accessible for children with disabilities. Some suggest tweaking, substituting or completely getting rid of curriculum that is not accessible to everyone.

Another area that needs to be explored is testing. India has extremely rigid assessments and examinations, which stems from their dependence on a British-style education system (briefly discussed above). Although some alternative mediums of testing are available to accommodate students with disabilities, “adaptations of tools, medium and methodology of assessment are all grey areas.”

But there are still other gaps in the system, basic issues of accessibility for children with disabilities that need to be changed if the education system is ever going to become inclusive. School buildings are predominantly not accessible to people with disabilities; only 18% of SSA schools were “barrier free,” and the numbers were even lower in some states, with 2% in Jammu and Kashmir, and 6% in Bihar. In India, most of the school buildings are already built, and building modifications are expensive in a country that already has resource-starved programs.

Funding is another gap in the system, and a very important one, that is preventing inclusion in the education system. In 1979 there was a 50-50 funding split in funding for public education between the state and central government. Programs do not run as effectively when they parallel between states and the central government because of the multiple parties involved. Some sources say that money is not being properly allocated and is not trickling down into the schools and places where it should be. Others argue that special education and inclusion should receive more funding than in proportion to their population of students with disabilities, to compensate for the lack of funding and infrastructure in the past.

How To Remove Barriers in Inclusive education

Teachers’ attitude:

“Where there is a will, there is a way”; it’s true in the case of the education of a child with special needs in a mainstream school. More than the techniques, equipments, aids and
amenities the major causative factor for a fuller, broader and a healthy inclusion. The attitudinal shaping is an important streak to be invested upon the teachers. The teacher training institutions, let it be pre service training or in-service training, their locus rests upon the bringing in an optimistic spirit amongst the teachers. The teachers should also be given enough room to brood upon the problems of the children in her busy schedule. It is also important that they posses enough love and affection to help the child get out of the trouble.

**Rigid curriculum**
The teachers should be trained to develop Individualized Educational Plans accommodating the curriculum and the needs of the child, putting them on one line. This becomes a tough job when the curriculum becomes rigid. This rigidity does not permit the teachers to provide enough space for the child with a special need in her class. In most of the cases, the teachers break through the curriculum and modify to the extent possible to help the children meet their realistic need through education. Many of the children with special needs are in need of functional academics to lead a hassle free life. The functional academics here in general means teaching 3Rs and helping the child use them effectively in her day to day living. But usually, this requirement changes from individual to individual depending upon the socio-economic, psychological and physiological conditions. I would say that simply providing 3Rs is not sufficient. The child must also be trained to augment and use his common sense productively.

**Rigid methods**
To solve the common problems of the education, new methods and strategies are suggested from time to time by the government. But they fail to understand the kind of difficulties the children with special needs undergo. The strategies and methods should be more accommodative. Any how, the teacher should also be given some space to alter the core of it. For example, the Activity Based Learning (ABL) is introduced now, no doubt it is a good method especially it provides freedom for the children to grow up on their own phase, but the heart of the system lies in the cards that are provided which are highly inaccessible to the visually challenged kids. If at all some tactile provisions are included in the cards, it would have helped not only in inclusion of the visually challenged kids, but also would have attracted the rest as the information is provided through multi mode.

**Peer support:**
The greater boon to inclusion is the peer support. The peers are taking active part in the education of their classmates that are with a special need. The personnel should encourage and tap the support. The child with a special need, enjoys the company of his peer, socializes and vents his grievances’. Not only the physical inclusion becomes possible with the
cooperation of the peers but also the academic inclusion turns easier as the children of the same age communicate their ideas easily and understand each other with a greater ease.

**Accessible environments:**

The physical conditions and psychological climate of the institution denies or accepts the student with a special need. In Indian conditions, the infrastructural barriers shall not be removed easily as it may involve lot of money. For example, an inaccessible stair case shall become accessible with the help of a friend who is ready to carry.

**Teaching aids and equipments:**

Innumerable equipments are found every day all through the world to help these children come out of their difficulties. Such supportive devices and equipments should be used widely to help these children. There shall be a cell created to disseminate such information (similar to that of the krishi (farmer) call centre). Such cells shall collect information pertaining to the latest resources that are available and also encourage the teachers and parents to use them. It shall also suggest local and modifications that could be done to the equipment and shall encourage the students from different disciplines to take up research in creating innovative aids and equipments for these children. This envisages multi disciplinary contribution and develops a cross disciplinary approach to the solutions.

**Early diagnosis and intervention:**

All gynecologist, pediatricians should be trained in the early diagnosis of disabilities. They should also be informed about various educational interventions apart from the services of the para professionals. The educational intervention should start at the earlier stage. There should be a separate institution with a comprehensive support of all professionals – clinician, paramedical and educational to ensure bringing out fullest potential of the student.

**Parents involvement:**

The parents are in need of proper guidance. They loose the very important early days of the child's development in doctor shopping. The doctors shall have a multi disciplinary approach in up bringing the children; there shall be special counselors to guide these parents for a holistic and total rehabilitation. All the information should be provided under one roof. The parents are not to run from post to pillar for information and services. They shall not ruin their mental energy in vein; providing the possibilities and developing a picturesque image of the realistic development of the child in the early years ensures proper utilization of the crucial periods of development.

**Supported teachers and schools**

The society and the local community shall support inclusion. The practical problems in educating the child with a special need viz transportation, community living and economic crisis shall be well supported by the
community in an united effort. Each one taking up some small part of the responsibility shall lessen the burden of the parents, teachers and the schools. After all the child is a part of the community and it shall behold responsibility in upbringing the child. The village education community, parent’s teachers association and such systems shall extend a helping hand in fulfilling the responsibilities of the schools in educating the children with special needs in terms of man, money and material. The schools shall possess administrators and staff who value inclusion and also allocate resources to support inclusion (time tables, staff). In order to achieve real inclusion, all the learning opportunities provided throughout the school (play, sports, and clubs) has to be strictly inclusive.

**Class size**

The lesser the size of the class, greater the scope for inclusion. The government shall not decrease the teacher pupil ratio at this moment, but the head teacher and other teachers shall think of reducing the size of the class of the particular section (sectionA, sectionB etc) small. For example, if there are 60 children in a grade, 40-45 children shall be put in a section and the rest in another section, including the child with special need in the smaller section to have better access, individual attention and provide extra time and efforts for the education of these children since proportionately the duties like correction, monitoring and other administrative work of the teacher gets reduced. Skillsstrategies to deliver curriculum differentiated instruction, student centered lesson becomes achievable through this.

**Ongoing training to school and community**

The authorities shall take up restoring the facilities and also increasing them. The optimistic spirit needs regular encouragement for happy and healthy restoration of the motivation. People friendly awareness campaigns, awards shall encourage inclusion.

**Access to specialists within school**

- The special teachers appointed under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan scheme are to face the challenges of
- Scattered population
- Huge number of schools under the perview
- Highly individualistic nature of the children with various disabilities as one teacher assumes responsibilities of educating and guiding children with different disabilities.
- Transportation
- Creating network between and amongst the regular staff
- Short time span
- Hence, trained teachers and para professionals should be accessible with in the school compound. The special teachers should be available within the school premises for
immediate support, provision and proper usage of resource / materials – adaptive materials, technology and to offer adequate supports and services for the students.

**Networking**

Networking amongst the stake holders and professionals for sharing of the experiences shall reduce reinventing wheels and smoothen service delivery. It also improves the quality of the service and brings in scope for viewing the problems from several and different angles. This network will be a real brain master for diagnosis and remedies.

**Success of inclusive classrooms:**

Well-designed **individualized education programs**, professional development for all teachers involved, general and special educators alike, Time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate the students together, reduced class size based on the severity of the student needs, Professional skill development in the areas of cooperative learning, peer tutoring, adaptive curriculum, collaboration between parents or guardians, teachers or para educators, specialists, administration, and outside agencies, sufficient funding so that schools will be able to develop programs for students based on student need instead of the availability of funding.

**Family-school partnerships**

- Collaboration between general and special educators
- Well-constructed plans that identify specific accommodations, modifications, and goals for each student
- Coordinated planning and communication between "general" and "special needs" staff
- Integrated service delivery
- Ongoing training and staff development

**Conclusion:**

Seen in this long-term, slightly chaotic, light, the sporadic implementation of inclusive education may be one step on this lengthy journey during which stakeholders learn from mistakes and adapt their plans and practices accordingly. The teacher education focus of some government programmes is perhaps going in the right direction. However, the apparently slight regard for content and methodology of the courses, which do not reconceptualise IE or address attitudes towards disability, demonstrates the need for further change in this context. Also, teachers are not the only stakeholders involved. Students, parents, administrators and local government officials are affected too, all of whom will see any innovation or new concept in a different light. A small pool of resources (4.1% of GDP for education (UNDP, 2005: 256) despite a promised 6% by 2000 (GOI, 2002)) combined with high demand, suggests that the development of the mainstream would be a more financially effective
and efficient way to go (Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 2003). This could result in smaller classes and better teaching which would benefit all students (Singal, 2005a). Arguably, resources would not be so limited after all if all specialist institution funding was moved to the mainstream, which may explain why Thomas (2005b) argues that there are indeed sufficient resources in India to implement inclusive education. However, this solution could mean that the essential services which some special schools provide (and would still be needed) would be spread wider, and thinner. Indeed, the government could find that the cost of well-resourced specialist provision spread across all schools rather than centralised in resource centers more financially prohibitive than the current situation. However, the reconceptualization of IE as whole school issue appears to be essential if IE is to be more than physical relocation of children with disabilities in a mainstream classroom. The inclusive education is not a dream but would definitely turn a reality, as we are still in the phase of development, these considering these issues and putting up efforts would lead to a real success.

7 References
