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Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities

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Introduction

Inclusive education, as an approach, seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. It implies all learners, young people - with or without disabilities being able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational setting with an appropriate network of support services. It aims at all stakeholders in the system such as learners, parents, community, teachers, administrators and policy makers to be comfortable with diversity and see it as a *challenge* rather than a *problem*.

Inclusive education means the education of all children, with and without disabilities together in regular schools. It is an approach, which takes into account unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs of all children. All schools have to be inclusive in their approach, so that the children with disabilities have access to these schools that accommodate within them a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting the needs of all children.

Inclusion in education means that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff.

It is an attempt to meet the unique needs of every child in a regular school setting. All children, in spite of their disability, try to participate in all facets of school life. So some changes might be made in the mainstream to make it more accommodating to all students' individual needs. The goal is to provide an accommodating, personalised education for all students, within the context of a general educational classroom.

Principles of Inclusive Education

Each children should have the opportunity to experience meaningful challenges, exercise choice and responsibility, interact collaboratively with others, and be actively engaged in developmental, academic, non-academic, inter and intra personal activities as part of the educational process. Implementation of the plans, programmes and actions depend upon continuous community support, broad planning, training and evaluation. An adapted school environment is needed to suit the needs of every child with disabilities. There is also a need for restructuring of the concept of special education and general education, as a dual system. Certain important principles of inclusion are:

- Sharing of responsibilities of functionaries working at different levels;
- Providing additional support to children;
- Development of a collaborative framework to meet the additional needs and interests of children;

- Implications for various types of disabilities;
- Knowledge about family and social environment children;
- Modifications in teaching-learning strategies/modalities;
- Improving professional competencies of teachers; and
- Ensuring community support and support of other functionaries working at different levels

The process of inclusion starts with the planning of education for all children under regular education in the classrooms, which is least restrictive. Children with disabilities need improvement in cognitive and social development and physical motor skills. All functionaries associated with school should share the responsibilities and support all children. Collaborative support of the school staff to meet the unique needs of all children is essential. Equality, sense of belongingness, respect for each other, need-based support, and diversity are some of the features of the inclusive schools (as shown in Fig. 18.1). Rights and needs of all children need to be considered in determining how and when to include children with disabilities in the school programmes. So far as the provision of individualised education programme is concerned, it is based on intensity of service required. Inclusive education strategies involve adaptations in strategic plans, policies, classroom management, teaching strategies and curricular transactions. Family and social circumstances of children are crucial to inclusion of children with disabilities.

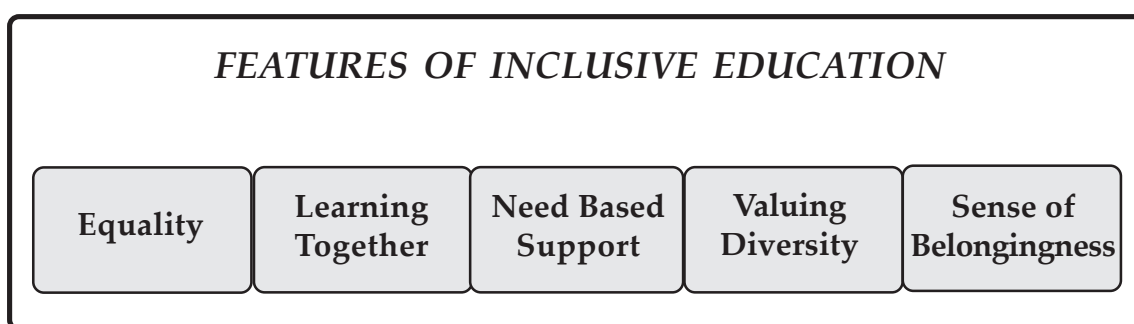


Fig. 18.1: Features of Inclusive Education

Models of Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities

In an ideal situation of inclusive education, the general education itself makes the education of children with disabilities as its integral part. This implies that the teacher should be equipped with skills to address the educational needs of children with disabilities to a minimum extent at least. This calls for strengthening the pre-service teacher preparation programme with adequate component of inclusion of children with disabilities. Thus inclusive education creates effective classroom where the educational needs of all children are addressed irrespective of their ability. Total inclusion occurs when general classroom teachers take most of the responsibilities of the classroom. If a specialist takes care of the children with disabilities in a general classroom it is not total inclusion.

There is no clear consensus in the field about the models to be practiced in the educational institutions. Some educational thinkers and researchers are for the full inclusion model (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994). A few others are in favour of partial inclusion (Hallahan and Kauffman 1991). Let us discuss these two models in detail.

Models of Full Inclusion

The strong movement towards inclusive education demands full time inclusion of children in regular education system. This model calls for providing support to every type and degree of disability in the regular classroom. Needless to say co-curricular activities also must be adapted to cater to the needs of all the children admitted in the school. Proper assessment and planning has to be made for every activity to be enjoyed by a child who may require special adaptation.

The following adaptations in the classroom functioning facilitate full inclusion.

i) Co-operative Learning

This is an effective way of including children with disabilities in a regular classroom. Here children in heterogeneous small groups work together towards a specific goal. Before making the groups, peers are deliberately trained to help a particular academic skill to children with disabilities.

ii) Instructional Adaptations and Accommodations

Instruction may be modified for learner with disabilities. Modifications usually take the form of modified assignments or modified instructional strategies. Children with disability feel comfortable in the group as the modification is made to suit them.

iii) Training General Education Teachers

General education teachers are content experts. But they are not well versed with the special needs of children with disabilities. Special education teachers usually lack expertise in teaching an individual subject. Keeping this in mind the general education teachers are given additional training in the area of specific disabilities and the special instructional needs.

iv) Practical Difficulties of Full Inclusion

- **Labeling** – There is a possibility that some children with disabilities feel inferior due to their deviant condition. This may lead to poor self-esteem in the child and hinder the child from taking part in other activities of the school.
- **Special instructional needs** – Few children with disabilities depending on the type and severity of their disability call for special material and method in the instructional setting. It may be feasible to provide those in a regular school. Thus regular schools may not be the ideal place for the practice of inclusiveness.
- **Stigma of groupism** – Children with disabilities may be viewed as a group and this will divert the attention from the individual. They may be treated as yet another minority group, adding to the already existing groups in the society.
- **Attitude of general educators** – Most teachers in the general stream feel that they are not capable of handling children with disabilities. Teachers already have a tedious job of catering to a huge number. Due to this over-burdening situation, they are unwilling to do extra work. It results in negative attitude of teachers and heads of institutes towards taking children with disability.

Conditions for Full Inclusion

It is clear now that full inclusion calls for total preparedness on the part of the school authorities. This model requires the classroom environment to be fully conducive for learning for all the children. The physical environment should be modified to suit the needs of children. For example in case of a child having hearing impairment there are certain prerequisites to be kept in mind while admitting the child to a regular education stream. Some of the crucial points are given below:

- Early intervention is important. It is essential that hearing impairment is identified and intervened before the age of six months.
- Suitable hearing device has to be used after proper diagnosis and medical intervention, if necessary.
- Training towards listening has to begin early to make up for the delay in auditory input.
- Development of age appropriate language and social skills.

Classroom Arrangement for Full Inclusion for a Child with Hearing Impairment

- Location – The school must be away from noisy locations like railway station, market place and industries.
- Noise levels – Within the classroom and outside the classroom the noise level must be controlled.
- Reverberation – The space for sound reflections must be minimized, as it affects speech perception.
- Visual aspects – The classroom must be well lit. Seating arrangement should facilitate maximum visibility of the teacher for every child.
- Classroom acoustics – The design of the room should avoid parallel walls. If it exists, it should be draped with thick curtains. The walls must be covered with charts.

Models of Partial Inclusion

These models came as a viable option to full inclusion. Some educators are in favour of these models as this is more practical. Unlike in case of full inclusion, here the system of education and the teachers adjust/prepare to handle the child with disability. The child is in the classroom throughout as per the ideology of inclusion. The partial inclusion models suggested by Hallahan, Kauffman and Pullen (2009) are given below.

i) Collaborative Consultation

In this approach a special educator and a general educator collaborate to identify teaching strategies for a student with disability. Regular meetings are scheduled between the two. The relationship between the two professionals is based on the premise of shared responsibility and equal authority. Special educator will see the child in a resource room or other setting. A change to the instruction is suggested to the regular classroom teacher, which is practiced in the classroom along with the regular plan of the teacher. Special educator helps the student to practice newly acquired skill and re-teach difficult skills. This model is suitable for an area where there is low incidence of students with special needs. If a school has got lesser number of students with special needs, this is a very useful model. In collaborative consultation a specialist will provide support to the general education teacher.

ii) Teaming Model

A team is assigned for each grade level. A period per week will be assigned to the team for planning. Team members meet with the special educators on a regular basis. In the meetings, the special educator provides information like the possible instructional strategies, modifications and ideas for assignments of students depending on the requirement of each team. This model is suitable when student to teacher ratio is high. But the special educator gets limited opportunities to work in general education classrooms for the children with disabilities.

iii) Cooperative Teaching (Collaborative Teaching)

A special educator and a general educator will teach the diverse group of students in the same classroom. Both educators are responsible for instructional planning and delivery, student achievements, assessment and discipline. Commonly it looks like one teacher is teaching and the other teacher assisting. In reality both of them would have worked together before the class, keeping in mind the requirement of the children who need special attention to learn the particular concept. Students receive age appropriate academic support service and possible modified instructions. There are minimum scheduling problems as general educators and special educators work together. This fosters continuous and ongoing communication between educators. This model is appropriate when the student to teacher ratio is small and this takes care of more number of children with disability included in a class.

The above models of inclusive education can be suitably implemented for education of children with hearing impairment keeping in view the severity of their impairments. As much as possible they are to be provided adequate environment for their learning and also for their social and emotional involvement with their age mates, keeping inclusive philosophy alive.

Challenges for Inclusion

Adequate academic as well as administrative support is the key for the success of inclusion of children with disabilities in general schools. The purpose of inclusion will not be served simply by enrolling these children. Respecting need of each child is a real challenge for the teachers and administrators. The basic challenges confronted by the stakeholders associated with inclusive education are:

- School reform
- Mind set of teachers, parents and community.
- Curricular adaptations for effective classroom processes.
- Capacity building of teachers and other functionaries
- Adapting need based instructional strategies
- Provision of adequate human resource and material resources
- Facilitating collaborative learning.
- Developing partnership with professionals and organisations

The various challenges of inclusion are being presented through a schematic diagram (Fig.18.2).



Fig. 18.2: Various Challenges of Inclusion

Innovations in Inclusive Education

Before concluding let us place a summary of innovation made in respect of inclusive education. Various innovations in inclusive education involve:

- initiating training programmes at various levels to accommodate the need of human resources,
- programmes ranging from certificate to doctoral degree covering variety of target groups,
- providing opportunity for cross disability approach,
- training in general education components,
- modifying training strategies, and
- use of technology in education of children in inclusive set-up.

Individual need based training components with stress on training on equipments related to disability can be a crucial component of the training curriculum. Strong emphasis is also required on group training components, general subject teaching components, and training components for inclusive classrooms. Modifications for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities can be made to suit the needs of all children. Project based training for society awareness is also important.

Certain modifications in classroom settings can be made in terms of sitting plan, easy accessibility, peer grouping and orientation of classroom settings. The content can be modified by simplifying, breaking it into small steps and further substitutions and deletion. Instructional methods should emphasize clarity in language and involve better use of body

language and gestures, stress on providing concrete experiences, use of suitable and variety of teaching learning materials and providing step by step instructions for better understanding.

Conclusion

In the model of inclusive education, it is not the child, but the education system, which is seen as a problem. Therefore, it is the system (with all its components) which should be changed, modified and made flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including children with disabilities. The onus for success is therefore on the flexibility of the system. It focuses on the environment, as the disabling cause because it fails to provide appropriate access to equal opportunities for all persons to participate fully in social life.

It is essential to build an inclusive society through an inclusive approach. Success of inclusion demands effective collaboration and meaningful cooperation from all stakeholders associated with education of children.

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