Role of Teachers in Education of Children with special Needs

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Abstract:

Looking at education through an inclusive lens implies a shift from seeing the child as the problem. An inclusive school must offer possibilities and opportunities for a range of working methods and individual treatment to ensure that no child is excluded from participation in the educational process. This implies the development of rights-based, child-friendly schools to focus on creating an optimum learning environment so that all children can learn well and achieve their potential. Concerted efforts must be made to ensure appropriate education and training programmes using different modalities for those who have so far been deprived from the fundamental rights of education. It is worth noting that action to promote and support inclusion should itself be inclusive, and needs to take place at several levels – with governments, with local authorities, with individual schools, with families and communities, and with children themselves. It must involve developing alternative and non-formal dimensions of learning within a holistic education system in order to promote inclusion at all levels. Teachers as well as school leaders must be encouraged to discuss learning and teaching as well as methods and possibilities for development. They must be given a chance to reflect together on their practice, and to influence the methods and strategies used in their classes and schools.

I-INTRODUCTION

Education is of central importance for the development and future well-being of a child's life. It equips people with knowledge and skills that are crucial to the development of individuals and their capacity to access their rights. According to a recent report for the World Bank Disability Group, "Education is widely seen as a means to develop human capital, to improve economic performance and to enhance individual capabilities and choices in order to enjoy freedoms of citizenship" (Peters 2003). Therefore, through rehabilitation and inclusive education, persons with disabilities are empowered to change their life chances and obtain the means to participate

more fully in their communities.Teachers, parents, curriculum planners, training institutions, school authorities and community workers are all key players in the development of a truly inclusive education and community service.

If we are to succeed, we must draw on our experience and on research that tells us that student achievement will improve when barriers to inclusion are identified and removed and when all students are respected and see themselves reflected in their learning and their environment. Everyone in the school community benefits from a school environment that is safe, accepting, and respectful. As noted Canadian educator and antiracism and equity advocate George Dei (2006) explains, Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone

II CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.E

.Inclusion – a developmental approach ineducation

Inclusive education as developmental approach seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and was restated at the Dakar World Education Forum (2000). Inclusive education means that *"... schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups."*

III- STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Inclusion should increase children's learning opportunities. This process should involve parents, all school-based personnel, support staff and the students themselves. It needs to focus not only on current barriers to inclusion but also on issues such as attitudes, ethos and curricula. All changes should be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. Students may have the right to be included but they also have the right to a quality education and access to all aspects of school life. As Fullan (1991) contends good change processes are characterized by trust, relevance, and the desire to get better results. He suggests that accountability and improvement be interwoven in the process to benefits tochildren.

1. Leadership

Visionary leadership is essential. The policies on admission and exclusion, for example, will reflect the ethos within the school. The school and staff together must make a commitment that all students are welcome in the school regardless of need. Teachers and other staff will work to have inclusive classes, and to break down the barriers to learning and participation that may

exist. For this to occur and become part of the culture of the school, all staff must be committed to this as a value for children, be able to articulate the reasons for their belief, be willing to defend this practice against detractors, and be willing to struggle, learn, and seek answers when specific approaches do not appear to be working for some students. These schools tend to use specialized school and community resources effectively to support and strengthen what happens in theclassroom.

2. Teachers

Central to successful inclusion are mainstream teachers who take responsibility of inclusion and who believe in their own competence to educate students with special educational needs (Thomas et al, 1998). This may present a challenge since the underlying assumption has been that students identified as having special needs belong in a different place, as well as a different pedagogical category, and thus could not be taught successfully by ordinary teachers (Avramidis et al., 2000). If schools are to be successful, a professional community of support among teachers will be needed. In an effective school, everybody works as a team. Specialists currently in special schools or units may be considered as essential participants in this team approach, especially as the role of the special schools evolves.

3. Teacher Beliefs andAttitudes

An important factor in determining the success of inclusion is the attitude of the teacher. According to O'Brien (2000), the real key resource for successful inclusion lies inside the teacher's head. Many teachers, when faced with the prospect of including a child with disabilities in their class, become less positive and experience anxiety and stress. This, however, can be moderated by access to training, resources and additional supports (Lindsay, 2007). Research suggests that when inclusion is carefully managed and planned, mainstream teachers gradually move from an attitude of skepticism to wanting to collaborate as part of a team (Wood, 1998). Lindsay (2007) highlights findings crucial to positive attitudes towards inclusion; these include resources, both physical and human, and support from the headteacher.

4. TeacherTraining

Teachers must be both competent and confident in their teaching ability. Brownell and Pajares emphasise that teachers' beliefs are 'important determinants and predictors of teaching practices' (1999, p.154). In a review of the literature on inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich cite a number of studies providing evidence that 'the school's ethos and the teachers' beliefs have a considerable impact on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion which, in turn, are translated into practice' (2002, p.140). Teacher training, both pre-service and in- service, is essential to develop the skills necessary to teach successfully in inclusive settings.Mittler states: Ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive teaching is the best investment that can be made (Mittler, 2000,p.137).

5. Teachers'Needs

Many teachers' concerns centre on issues such as appropriate curriculum, in-class support, ongoing training, their ability to teach diverse groups of children, planning time, how high to set

expectations and how to assess the students. Putnam (1998) acknowledges that it is not always easy to teach children of very different abilities in the same class. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) concluded from teachers' feedback that the factors viz., time for planning, training, personnel resources material resources, class size and consideration of the severity of the disability are essential for successfulinclusion.

6. InvolvingFamilies

Parents' views on inclusion vary greatly (Farrell, 1997). For many parents, inclusion is the preferred option because (i) families know certain aspects of their children better than anyone else; (ii) families have the greatest vested interest in seeing their children learn; (iii) the family is likely to be continuously involved with the child's education programme throughout his or her entire school career; (iv) families have the ability to positively influence the quality of educational services provided in their community and (v) families must live with the outcomes of decisions made by educational teams all day, every day (Giangreco, 1997 p.196).

7. The Voice of theChild

Pupils are key stakeholders in education and the promotion of the voices of those with special educational needs has been recognized as crucial to the development of a more inclusive education system (Rose and Shevlin, 2004). Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to be consulted and heard on all matters affecting them and to have that view taken into account and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (UN, 1989). The Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b) also stresses the rights of pupils to be involved in making decisions and exercising choices. Pupils' insights and perspectives have the potential to provide crucial directions for school improvement and information to enhance learning, teaching and relationships (Gross, 2002). Flutter and Rudduck (2004) highlight the "transformational potential" of consulting pupils; they see the testimony of learners as providing essential firsthand evidence for improving teaching and learning. Consulting children and including them in school decision making also increases educational engagement and reduces the risk of exclusion (Frederickson and Cline, 2002).

8. Curriculum

Accessible and flexible curricula can be a key to creating schools that meet the needs of all students. An inclusive approach seeks to discourage teaching that is based on a criterion of averages. Curriculum must take into consideration the different abilities and needs of all students. It must be capable of being adapted to meet diverse needs. Strategies such as flexible time frames for work completion, differentiation of tasks, flexibility for teachers, time for additional support and emphasis on vocational as well as academic goals can beuseful (UNESCO, 2005). Together with flexible curricula, flexible teaching-learning methodology is necessary.

IV- PRACTICAL TIPS FOR REMOVING BARRIERS IN EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

❖ Create an environment in which all children feel equallyvalued.

❖ Children should be allowed to communicate in their first language, even when this is different than the language of instruction used in school, whether sign language or another minority language. If you or none of the other teachers in your school speak the child's first language (mother tongue), try to find someone who does, such as someone from her/his family orcommunity.

❖ Children should be allowed time to express their thoughts and opinions. Many children with disabilities will need more time than other children to express themselves.

❖ Try to ask questions to children (especially those who are struggling with academic learning) that you are confident they will be able to answer. This will build confidence and motivate children to continue theirlearning.

❖ Be generous, genuine and honest with praise. This will help children to build confidence and to develop a healthyself-esteem.

❖ Children should be encouraged to state their opinion, and we should try to use their suggestions wherever this ispossible.

❖ We should encourage both boys and girls to become involved in all curricular and extra-curricularactivities.

❖ If a child suddenly changes behaviour or acts differently from the way s/he used to, we should try to find out why. If we suspect that this may be caused by abuse (verbal, emotional, physical or sexual), we should seek advice and help from organizations that work with child rights and child protection. These organizations are found in most communities throughout the world. The nearest Save the Children and UNICEF offices may also be able tohelp.

❖ We should evaluate the academic, social, emotional and physical development (progress) of children, instead of just measuring their performance in comparison to others. The progress children make should be evaluated based on their individual learning plans. These plans should be developed paying close attention to possible barriers to learning, development and participation the child mayface.

❖ Organize the classroom and seat the children to optimize opportunities for communication, interaction and learning for all the children in the classroom – with special focus on those children who experience barriers to learning, development andparticipation.

❖ Make sure that you let all the children in the class know that you care about them and theirneeds.

V. ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

It is vital for trainee teachers to learn about inclusive education fromday one of theirtraining, so that focusing on quality and inclusive teaching and learning is seen as a natural part of every teacher's job. It is equally important for existing teachers to participate in ongoing professional development that helps them to constantly reflect on their attitudes and practices and strive to improve the inclusiveness of their schools. Such professional development can include formal in-service training courses and ongoing learning opportunities, such as having access to relevant reading materials and being given the time for individual study, participating in action research initiatives and engaging in teacher discussion groups.

It is not sufficient for teachers/trainee teachers only to be offered one-off or stand-alone courses on inclusive education. Such courses are often not compulsory and/or might not contribute to the trainee teacher's final grade, offering the trainee little incentive to take the course. Stand-alone courses also potentially send out messages that inclusive education is a special topic for a handful of specialist teachers, not an issue that is important for every teacher. Finally, stand-alone courses often perpetuate misunderstandings that inclusive education is a separate initiative/project as opposed to an approach for whole-school improvement. These last two points can be significant barriers to encouraging all teachers to take responsibility for all learners. To ensure that every child has a teacher who is trained on inclusive education and acknowledges their responsibility to be inclusive, there needs to be:

❖ **Attention given to addressing inclusive education in pre-service and in-service teacher training and through continuing professional development activities**. While NGOs have often intervened to provide in-service training programmes, these may reach only a small percentage of serving teachers. Countries need their governments to support the scale-up of such in-service training and development for teachers and to develop inclusive pre-servicetraining.

❖ a mixture of (i) **specific courses** that focus on inclusive education, and (ii) a concerted effort to **'embed' inclusive education** principles into all teacher training courses and activities.

❖ **a review and revision of teacher training courses, curricula and materials**; with the review process involving training institutions and ministry of education personnel, as well as trainers, teachers and other education stakeholders from diverse sections of thecommunity.

❖ **advocacy to encourage teacher training institutions and ministries to undertake such changes**; and to build the capacity of teachers and other education stakeholders to demand comprehensive improvements in teacher training and continuing professional development opportunities at alllevels.

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion. Therefore Teacher Preparation Programmes should essentially include the following:

1. The Inclusive Teacher is a professional in education with a strong commitment to his/her community. The Teacher Preparation Programme should include subjects with high social and community content because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the

environment. For this reason the teachers need to be involved.

2. The inclusive teacher recognizes individual differences and implements learning strategies for all. The educational intervention is oriented to diversity and promotes learning strategies for all (equality), for quite a few and for only one (equity). Quality, equality and equity concepts should be translated into specific actions of educativeinterventions.

3. All programmes for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers must be based on the interpretative and critical paradigms as this paradigm generates conditions for dialogue and collaboration. This vision transforms two ideas (you and me) to a new figure (us). Such dialogue and collaboration are key elements in inclusiveeducation.

4. For teachers to promote inclusive education, their training should link directly with the educational services in so called contextual professional practice. This approach, in our experience, must be presented to all throughout the training process structuring with multi-directional flow between theoretical and experiences close to educationalfield.

5. Cross Categorical/Multi-tiered formation. Diversity needs a global and common vision; philosophy, values, legal frame, language and shared knowledge as learning theories, special educational needs, support systems, educational intervention; strategies for large and small groups and individuality, tutoring and curricular adjustments. Inclusive education must characterize all training teacher programs, offering skills and common benchmarks for everyone regardless of education level to be entered (e.g. Primary, Secondary and High Education). This versatile training enables various teachers, regardless of their field or level of training, to collaborate and participate in the diversity of educational contexts together. The common reference on inclusive education frameworks that must be present in all Teacher Training Programsare:

A. *Common vision.* The philosophy of inclusion, legal frameworks that enable an education for all with quality and equity, educational policy that promotes attention to diversity, the historical evolution from marginalization to inclusion and conceptions among others, are fundamental aspects in educational programs.

b. *Language and common knowledge.* Emphasize the student's possibilities and support systems, with a clear vision that all children can learn. In this way the school needs to prevent the barriers and limitations for learning that could marginalize children and young people from their potential. It also includes learning conception, individual differences, the values of solidarity, respect, and collaboration. Cognitive and affective elements framed in the conception of collectivity and community empowerment as well.

c. *Educational attention to diversity practices.* Includes strategies for large or small groups and one-on-one, mentoring, curricular adjustments, alternative support systems, diversity assessment actions, collaboration with other professionals and co-teaching, trans-disciplinary action, among others. They are essential for the development of the professional skills of attention to diversity.

6. Mentoring. New teachers must participate with experienced teachers at least during the

first two years. This includes dialogue sessions, reviews of situations, decision- making arrangements and work plans, among others to provide the following to the new teacher: intervention (guidance), facilitation (advice), and cooperation (co- responsibility).

a. *Intervention.* The role of the experienced teacher is directive and assumes a leadership position, where instruction is given through interpersonal behavior which provides materials and ideas to be adapted, and so dominates the transmission of information with an emphasis on the explanation and application of knowledge and skills.

b. *Facilitation.* The role of the experienced teacher is consulting. His/her interaction with the novice teacher provides advice and listens, encourages and clarifies. The experienced teacher provides materials designed for this purpose and promotes the discussion and review of diverse conceptions. The experienced teacher assumes a role of coordinator of decisions and is a strong observer. This model focuses on interactive work methodology and improves the quality of actionprocesses.

c. *Cooperation.* A critical friend or colleague is the experienced teacher role and their relationship is interdependent and a source of mutual learning, shared responsibility, experience or convergence of perspectives. Materials and ideas are developed together. There is an awareness of reaching agreements and reaching a consensus on courses of action. Cooperative research is promoted. Both input to the improvement plan. There is shared leadership and promotion of interdependence, reciprocity, collegiality and solidarity. The best features of accompaniment and mentoring are developed under the facilitation and cooperationapproach.

VI RECCOMENDATION FOR EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIALNEEDS

The goal for education and rehabilitation is to widen and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners vulnerable to exclusion to realize their potential. For teachers to work effectively in inclusive settings, they need to have the appropriate values and attitudes, skills and competences, knowledge and understanding. In the context of the goal, the following recommendation may beworthwhile:

❖ Foster education policies that combine effectiveness and equity at all levels of education to prevent drop out and fostersuccess.

❖ Build reliable indicators and statistical data to support effective planning and monitoring of education and trainingpolicies.

❖ Ensure that all teachers are trained to assume responsibility for all learners irrespective of their individualneeds.

❖ Develop personalized learning approaches for all learners, where the learner sets, records and reviews their own learning goals in collaboration with their teachers and families and is helped to develop a structured way of learning independently in order to take control of their ownlearning.

- ❖ Develop Individual Education Plan (IEP) for learners (possibly with more complex learning needs) who may require a more focused approach for their learning to maximize independence and involvement in goal setting and also collaboration with parents andfamilies.

Improve initial training and continuing professional development for teachers and other professionals involved in the education process so as to provide them with appropriate methodological tools and supports.

- ❖ Teacher assessment that supports learning and does not label or lead to negative consequences for learners should take a holistic/ecological view that considers academic, behavioural, social and emotional aspects of learning and clearly informs next steps in the learningprocess.

- ❖ All teachers should be prepared to work in inclusive education in their initial training and then have access to further, in-service training later in their careers in order to develop the knowledge and skills to enhance their inclusive practice in inclusive settings.

- ❖ Teacher-training systems should provide opportunities for the training of specialized teachers in order to maintain and develop specialist resources for supporting all teachers in inclusivesettings.

- ❖ Teacher-training systems should provide opportunities for shared training opportunities for professionals from different services and sectors in order to facilitate effective collaborativeworking.

- ❖ Teacher-training systems should provide opportunities for training for school/educational organization leaders in developing their leadership skills and vision in line with the promotion of inclusive values andpractice

- ❖ Mechanisms for the funding and resourcing of education that promote – rather than hinder – inclusion are guided by financing policies that are geared towards providing flexible, effective and efficient responses to learners'needs.

- ❖ Policies that aim to promote quality in inclusive education are flexible enough to reflect local levelneeds.

- ❖ To implement inclusive education, the goals of the policy should be effectively communicated to all members of the educational community. Educational leaders at all levels have an essential role in translating and implementing policy that promotes quality in inclusiveeducation.

- ❖ Policies that promote quality in inclusive education need to address attitudes towards learnerswithdiverseneeds,aswellasproposeactiontomeettheirneeds.Such policies outline teacher, school/educational organisation and support structure/service level responsibilities.

- ❖ There should be comprehensive and coordinated legislation for inclusive education that fully addresses issues of flexibility, diversity and equity in all educational institutions for all learners. It ensures that policy, provision and support are consistent across geographical

areas of a country/region. Such legislation should be based upon a 'rights approach' where individual learners can access mainstream education and necessary support services within alllevels.

CONCLUSION

If we are to meet our Millennium Development Goals we are challenged to commit ourselves to providing support to IE. Universal primary education is a worthy goal but it can only be achieved if we make a conscious effort to move in our thinking and planning from Education for All to Inclusive Education—*Education for All—Together*. 'Many Helping Hands' are needed but better results will only be achieved when the right hands with the right expertise and commitment are deployed. The time has come to aspire for excellence in educating children with special needs. This suggests that the twin-track approach advocated by DFID (2000) may be a constructive way forward for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Indian education system. While some programmes could focus specifically on educational provision for children with disabilities, others could mainstream disability alongside gender and other exclusionary dimensions such as poverty. This would ensure the inclusion of all in programmes intended to widen the impact of institutional systems such as education. Special attention must be paid to ensure that classroom teachers have the skills and support needed to provide quality education to children with diverse learning needs. Preparing teachers with essential knowledge and skills for inclusive education also requires the commitment of all actors. Preparing teachers does not simply mean providing prospective teachers with inclusive education skills; it is important to provide training and support for existing teachers as well. Building the capacity for inclusive education must include awareness raising activities as well as integrated pre- service and in-service teacher training programs to ensure that teachers are aware, ready and willing to bring inclusive education into action. If there is to be, a basis of hope, there will need to be some significant changes to the current position with regard to teacher education and education more generally. Establishing a basis of hope, therefore is an urgent, difficult, exciting and necessary task. The well-being of *all* learners is at stake. This approach is indeed recommended in the Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action: "*... **In order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups, education systems should respond flexibly… Education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled, and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners***…*"(Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Expanded Commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action, Para33)

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