

## Inclusion of Children with Special Needs A Case study of scheme in operation

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present study brings forth the grassroots level version of a highly valuable scheme that is going astray during the course of its implementation due to the way of its (mis-) translation into action. Making elementary education a fundamental right of every child through the Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE 2009) is indeed a landmark and a catalyst in the process of transforming India into a vibrant nation. Its implementation entails universal access to schooling which demands provision of schooling facilities within the reasonable reach of all children, including the Children with Special Needs (CWSN) very specifically, essentially because of their large strength. Inclusion of CWSN is a defining task and deserves to be seen in terms of physical access, social access as well as quality of access. The question however remains whether these concerns and their translation into action stand true in the case of CWSN studying in the state-run schools, much less of the ones in the private schools. To ascertain the status at grassroots level a field based study was conducted in Dewa Block of Barabanki District of Uttar Pradesh. Five schools having CWSN on roll were selected on random basis. Data was collected with the help of semi structured interview and focus group discussions with school principals and teachers.*

*The plan as well as its implementation strategy, it emerged at grassroots level observations, are extremely deficient and considerably erratic.*

*Thus, in striving for inclusive education, we have unwittingly been turning a blind eye to the elephant in the room. If inclusion requires a child to be excluded from the required experiences and boundaries just to remain on the premises, then it's not inclusion. Inclusion is important but not at such costs.*

**Key Words:** *Elementary Education, RTE Act, Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education, Resource Teachers,*

Traditionally, children with disabilities and learning difficulties would have been marginalised within or excluded from education due to their apparent incapacities (Minou, 2011). Lodge and Lynch (2004, p.79) acknowledge an international process whereby children were traditionally categorised within education as either 'handicapped' or 'normal', and separate educational provision was thus made for each group. This segregation of children within education was considered the most appropriate and effective option for meeting the needs of a minority of children, deemed incapable of benefiting from ordinary methods of instruction (Thomas et al 1998, cited in NCSE, 2010) and for "safeguarding the efficient education of the majority" (Pijl and Meijer 1994, cited in NCSE 2010, p.5).

As we have completed nine years of the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009 it is time to once more take stock on the status of the right to education of children who are amongst the most excluded from education in nearly all countries of the world: children with special needs or children with disabilities. Reason being that the right to education is being recognized as the right to Inclusive Education. 'Inclusive Education' is a most appropriate modality for states to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education. As per the Census of 2011, there are 6.57 million children with disabilities in the school going age group (5-19) in our country. Various documents of governments and related organizations speak of a number of efforts being made to for providing quality education to such children.

'The creation of inclusive education systems is fundamental to achieving better quality in education and realising the human rights of all children. Inclusive education can raise the quality bar across education systems, by using strategies that cater for naturally diverse learning styles of all students, whilst accommodating the specific learning needs of some students. They also serve to target and include other marginalised groups of children, helping to ensure inclusion for all.' (Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities 2013)

Inclusion may be defined as "a process involving a programme, curriculum, or educational environment where each child is welcomed and included on equal terms, can feel they belong and can progress to his/her potential in all areas of development". Inclusion is not about, for example, awarding all children who run a

race a medal in order to “protect self-esteem, and foster the dogma of fairness” (Asma 2012). Nor should it be judged on whether a school simply admits a child with a disability and allows participation, without adjusting curriculum and how the teachers work, argues Philips (2001). Nurse (2001) determines the meaning of inclusion to imply the meeting of children’s needs within the mainstream system, so that children are part of their family’s natural community and are socialised and educated alongside their peers. Nurse distinguishes the concept of inclusion from that of ‘integration’, which implies that children receive a ‘parallel education’, meaning within the mainstream physically, but not always given access to all the activities available to other children in the class. The term ‘inclusion’ however, moves the focus from the child to the school – it conveys the school’s duty to welcome pupils with special educational needs and the pupil’s right to full participation in school life and all aspects of education (NCSE 2010). UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (1994), assumes that human differences are normal, and that learning must be adapted to the needs of the child, rather than the child fitted to the process. Mousley et al (1993) found, in their study on teachers’ perceptions of integration, that many participants stated they would be prepared to teach children with a physical disability rather than an intellectual disability. This, according to the researchers, implies a willingness among educators to adapt the physical environment “as opposed to undertaking the types of curriculum innovations which make education more accessible to all” (Mousley et al, 1993, p.64). Sparks and Edwards (2010) note an uncertainty among some adults, where they are not sure if they should encourage children to notice and learn about differences, worrying that it may cause prejudice, and instead teach how people are the same. Anti bias educators believe difference is not the problem, but rather how people respond to it that creates fear and bias. The early years are a good place to start fostering and strengthening children’s identities, and to raise awareness of diversities and promote positive attitudes in typically developing children from a young age, say Lee and Keulen (2007). The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) promotes inclusive schools as the ‘most effective’ means of combating discriminatory attitudes, and of building solidarity between children with special needs and their peers. Studies and reports on inclusive education highlight the social value for both children with disabilities and non-disabled children (Briody and Martone 2010; Lodge and Lynch 2004; Mousley et al 1993; NCSE 2010). A study by Madden and Slavin (cited in Briody and Martone, 2010), found that students with special educational needs demonstrated higher self esteem and more appropriate behaviour when integrated into mainstream classrooms. Hanline and Murray (cited in Briody and Martone, 2010) identify social benefits for children even if they only spend a small portion of a school day with mainstream peers. Shevlin and O’Moore (1999, cited in Lodge and Lynch 2004) found that many students may feel uneasy or distant around peers who have disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities. However, once young people come to know their peers personally, Lodge and Lynch (2004) maintain they are less likely to define a person by their disability or view them as someone to be ‘pitied’. As Cumming and Wong (2010) point out, the benefits of inclusion are most commonly identified in the domains of ‘social competence, play and peer engagement’, but Mousley et al (1993, p.66) assert that placing focus on the social and attitudinal domain and little emphasis on academic possibilities reflects the “typical curricula of segregated settings” and the attitude and belief that children with disabilities belong to “a different pedagogical category from other children”.

Equality, participation, non-discrimination, celebrating diversity and sharing good practices are essential ingredients of inclusive education. On theoretical plane, it is emphasized that instead of segregating children with disabilities in special schools, meaningful learning opportunities to all students may be provided, through inclusion, within the regular school system. Ideally, it allows children with and without disabilities to attend the same age appropriate classes at the local school, with additional individually tailored support as needed. It requires physical accommodation as well as a new child-centred curriculum that includes representations of the full spectrum of people found in society and reflects the needs of all children. The question however remains whether these concerns and their translation into action stand true in the case of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) studying in the state-run schools, much less of the ones in the private schools.

To ascertain the status at grassroots level a field based study was conducted in Dewa Block of Barabanki District of Uttar Pradesh. Five schools having CWSN on roll were selected on random basis. Data was collected with the help of semi structured questionnaire and focus group discussions with school principals and teachers.

### **Objectives of the study:**

- To study the available resources for CWSN in Dewa Block of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh

- To study the problems faced by school level authorities because of the inclusion of CSWN in Dewa Block of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh

### **Methodology:**

The study was qualitative in nature. The data was collected through semi structured interview and focus group discussions from the state run schools of Dewa Block of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh

### **The Sample:**

The study was conducted in the five Government schools, Dewa Block of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. All the teachers of the same schools served the sample of the study.

### **Tools of the study:**

Data was collected with the help of semi structured interview schedule and focus group discussions with school principals and teachers.

### **Data Collection:**

For data collection interview model was chosen. This enabled and facilitated asking questions, elicit answers, uncover perspectives and notions, and give the subjects the opportunity in which to give meaning to their respective roles.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

After conducting interviews and taking field notes a number of issues emerged, amongst them the prominent one is that the plan and strategy as may be observed at the grassroots level are deficient and considerably erratic. In all, the Dewa Block with 300 elementary schools has been assigned only three resource teachers!

Principal of one of the schools volunteered that her school had one deaf and dumb student on roll. A designated Resource teacher was supposed to visit her school once a week. But, in fact, the Resource teacher visited the school only once in the whole academic session.

On their part, the teachers and school could extend no special support to the deaf and dumb child in school. The only favour that they provided was to let her sit in front row of the class. The teachers and principal stated that they really wanted to help and teach the (single such) girl student but they could only communicate the routine things but not the content. She has to sit in and share the class with other non-CSWN children although she is to be taught by the special educator with a special educational Plan, obviously separately. She learns whatever the special educator decides whereas the other teachers had no idea of it.

The school head and teachers informed that they as teachers and institution were not adequately equipped to respond to the special needs of the children. One teacher informed that the girl student's writing was quite good, but due to lack of required competency among the general teachers the girl gets coerced to sit idly. The only thing which teachers can evaluate is her writing. Ironically the qualified teacher turned out to be nothing more than the layman for this differently able girl. In regards to investigator's query about the other children's behaviour with her the teachers stated that earlier the other children used to find her 'strange'. They used to tease her and make fun of her. But gradually they came to be accustomed and used to her. Now some of her classmates are friendly and support her whenever she needs it. But the girl, while remaining physically present in the class could hardly gain anything on academic front. Yet, apparently her social development was proceeding up to the mark. Other children of her class were also getting accustomed to live with differently-abled children. But the learning environment and opportunity for CSWN were as missing as the absentee special educator.

In another school in the same block, there was enrolled a boy with profound disabilities, including a brain malformation which had resulted in decreased cognitive function and physical impairments. The teachers confessed that they really did not know how to teach such a student and even how to take care of him. At times they really felt helplessness even if even they wanted to communicate with him. At one point of time a-three day training was given organised but it was just an eye wash. In each and every sample school the teachers were facing problems of more or less same nature.

As regards the record keeping, resource teachers and itinerary teachers furnish monthly progress report of each and every child for the preparation of which a proper format is laid down. Technically, school head's signatures are to be put on the format. Reports are indeed filed as per requirement. But how the head's signatures are managed, the head was not aware. In other schools too, more or less the same or similar status prevailed.

## Conclusions

What emerges from meetings and discussions with teachers and principals of elementary schools is that in spite of the RTE being in operation for the last eight years, the needy children continue to confront roadblocks in getting into schools and experience uselessness while staying in the system. Data on inclusive education continues to show that children with disabilities are the largest categories of children who are out of school. Thus, in striving for inclusive education, we have unwittingly been turning a blind eye to the elephant in the room. If inclusion requires a child to be excluded from the required experiences and boundaries just to remain on the premises, then it's not inclusion. Inclusion is important but not at such costs.

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