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Inside:
Perspectives
Barriers to Inclusion
Inclusive Practices

INCLUSIVE

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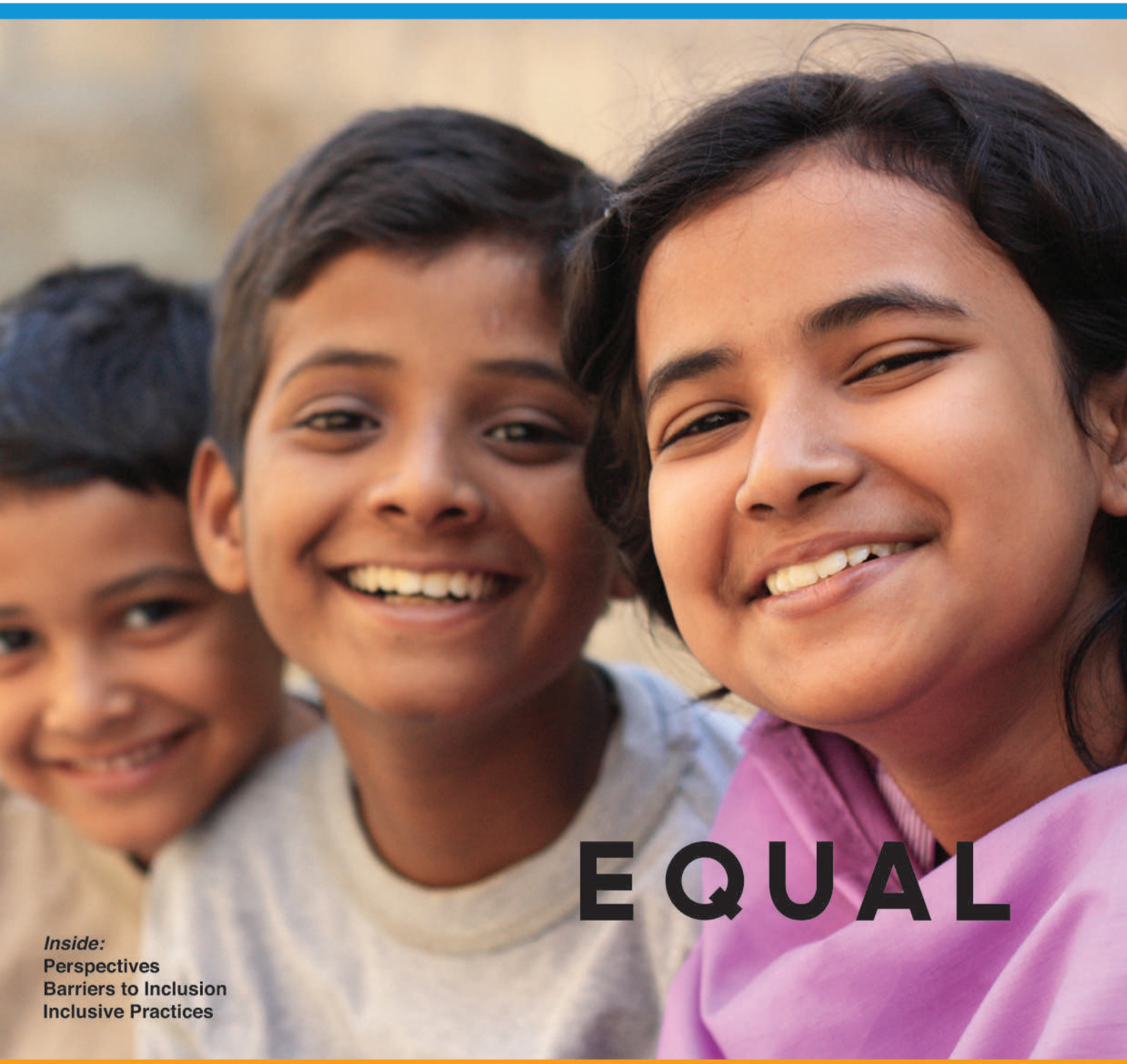

EQUAL

Inside:
Perspectives
Barriers to Inclusion
Inclusive Practices

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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"Learning Curve is a publication on education from Azim Premji University. It aims to reach out to teachers, teacher educators, school heads, education functionaries, parents and NGOs, on contextual and thematic issues that have an enduring relevance and value to help practitioners. It provides a platform for the expression of varied opinions, perspectives, encourages new and informed positions, thought-provoking points of view and stories of innovation. The approach is a balance between being an 'academic' and 'practitioner' oriented magazine."

FROM THE EDITOR

In any situation in life, human beings want to be included: it begins in the playground even as children take their first tentative steps into socializing in the world around them. We sometimes see a child – or children- standing at the fringes of a group engrossed in an activity or game, looking forlorn and dejected until they are inducted into the group. This desire presents itself at every stage, even into adulthood, when we get our first jobs, indeed till the very end of life.

However, in the less than ideal world of ours, exclusion is rampant. Whether that is based on creed, colour, race, ethnicity, class, gender – the list is very long- human beings can become victims of illogical, irrational prejudices. Paradoxically, as boundaries shrink and the terms such as, 'global village' become commonplace, there are deeper and deeper fissures.

This Issue is in answer to the many types of biases that have existed, and still exist, in human society. It can take many different hues and each country has to tackle the issue in its own way. In India we battle discrimination based on caste, creed, social class, gender and disabilities, etc. In the past, educational and employment opportunities were denied to various categories of people based on one or more of these divisive forces.

However, the scenario now makes us much more optimistic. Diversity has begun to be valued as a marker for greater and richer human understanding and is now a point of view to show the measure we place on variegated experiences. 'Classrooms without walls' is an ideal that has been talked about and discussed, though like many ideals, it has still to take concrete shape.

To make the right to education for all a reality, it is the responsibility of every society to make sure that its educational system answers basic learning needs and enriches every child's life so that he or she is assured of the right to a childhood, later emerging as a happy, well-adjusted adult. However, even in the 21st century, this remains a distant and remote dream for millions of children across the globe. Children continue to experience exclusion on the basis of socially ascribed or traditionally perceived differences such as gender, economic condition, class, religion and, in India, caste as well. Education is a key tool in preventing and removing obstacles in the path to a child's right to growth in any sphere that he or she may choose.

Although inclusion is a concept that concerns us all as it is a basic human desire to 'fit in' to any group that we might be part of, physical disability is the most evident as a differentiator. Specially challenged children today want the opportunity to be included because they want to be a part of the productive work force, although it is equally true that one's employability is not the only index of one's worth. Because they do not get the critical first job, there is the knock-on effect which places subsequent opportunities out of reach. By the same token, differences in caste, creed, social class and gender are guilty of discrimination first in school and later in higher institutions of education, in social situations, in opportunities, in world-views and therefore in personality. Although we know that the human mind veers almost naturally to categorization, it is difficult to see how and why diversity is not celebrated, especially in a world without frontiers and with geographical boundaries disappearing with the internet, TV and ever more improved forms of instant connectivity.

There is today a brave new world waiting to be explored and conquered in a manner that earlier generations of explorers and adventurers, however intrepid, could not have dreamed of, for it is a world of ordinary people, like most of us, who want to do away with borders of human achievement.

This being the case and committed as we are in the Azim Premji Foundation to promoting every type of equality and diversity while at the same time demolishing preconceived notions of barriers in human progress, Learning Curve decided to devote this Issue to Inclusive Education as a theme. In this Issue, readers will find articles on literature for children particularly emphasizing inclusion, on gender stereotyping and an article on RTE and inclusion in schooling.

There are other viewpoints as well: as a sample, I mention integration of adolescents with learning difficulties into mainstream schooling, thereby providing a school environment for those who

otherwise might drop out, the place of textbooks in creating cultural differences and ways this could be remedied, differentiating between inclusion and integration as concepts. We also have an article on teaching language to include, caste as a barrier to education and upward social mobility and, finally, teacher preparedness in curriculum development. This last is particularly significant, for at the centre of beneficial change lies the wise and aware teacher.

The list is not complete, it is merely a selection of the array of the thought-provoking and reflective articles that our contributors have written, in response to our request to shed some light on this critical aspect of human progress. For there is no doubt about that: progress depends on our ability to respect differences and honouring them as adding to rich tapestry of life.

We could not have produced so enriched an Issue without our special advisors. For this one, we have relied heavily on the unflagging help and support of Dr. Ankur Madan and Dr. Jyothsna Latha Belliappa. Thank you both!

Prema Raghunath
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SECTION A
PERSPECTIVES

Inclusion is the Way Forward

Ankur Madan

It would not be erroneous to state that educational discourse in India has been largely unresponsive to the challenges of education of children with disabilities until the recent past. With impetus provided to the 'Education For All' (EFA) adage by the implementation of the Right to Education Act (RtE), it is now being increasingly acknowledged that including children with disabilities into the mainstream is pertinent to achieving the EFA goal. This paper presents a brief overview of the multiple understandings of inclusive education and its interpretations for policy and makes a case for initiative on part of schools to embrace inclusive practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all its pupils.

Inclusive education in the Indian context

'Inclusion and exclusion are not uniform categories. Each situation is shaped by its own historical, cultural, global and contextual influences' (Barton & Armstrong, 2007).

As a phenomenon that has gained recognition in India only in the recent past, arriving at a consensus definition and developing a clear understanding of inclusion both as a concept and as an ideology has been predictably hard. Referred to as a phenomenon that originated from a western mindset, inclusion has been dismissed and often misunderstood. Singal (2005) stated that inclusive education is "…a concept that has been adopted from the international discourse, but has not been engaged with in the Indian scenario" (p.9). In another context, she says that the use of the term inclusive education appeared more fancy and politically correct and hence was adopted by practitioners and policy planners without necessarily developing a clear understanding of the notion behind it (Singal, 2006). It was only as recently as in the 90s that some voices rose in support of the ideals of inclusive education in India. Jangira (1995) and Kaur and Karanth (1993) warned against the disregard of the western paradigm. They emphasized that this repudiation was likely to postpone the attainment of the goal of EFA.

Difficulty in developing a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education has also stemmed from the fact that the term has often been interchangeably used with integration. Whereas the use of terms like 'mainstreaming' and 'integration' with reference to education of the disabled is well-documented in policy and legal taxonomy, inclusive education has been a recent entrant. As Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) pointed out, inclusive education originated as a challenge to the restrictions imposed by the existing models of mainstreaming and integration. It is pertinent that the two concepts be recognized as distinct not only in meaning and ideological affiliation, but also their diverse implications for practice. Whereas integration pertains to a locational or geographical and social integration of children with special needs in regular classrooms, where readiness of the child with the disability is considered as a precondition for its success, inclusion subscribes to a 'whole school' approach wherein schools are urged to become adaptable and inclusive in their day to day educational practices for all students (Lindsay, 2007). While terminological ambiguity has tainted consensual understanding, inclusive education policy in India too has sundry interpretations.

Policy support for inclusive education

In principle, inclusive education has been embraced as the way forward by all major establishments related to elementary education in India in general

and disability in particular in the last two decades. Originating from the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), which Ainscow and Cesar (2006) referred to as 'the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education' (p.231), inclusive education received widespread recognition across the world. In India, schemes such as the Integrated Education for Disabled Children, (IEDC, 1974) launched by the Government of India and the Project Integrated Education of Disabled Children (PIED), launched during the Sixth Five Year Plan (1985-1989), had laid the foundation for inclusive education to be adopted at least in principle. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) adopted the inclusive education philosophy in 1997 (Sanjeev &Kumar, 2007). The Persons with Disability Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) 1995 emphatically stated the need for equal opportunities for persons with disability and directed state and local authorities to take appropriate action towards meeting the goal. Policy support for inclusion gained impetus with the launch of programmes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) during the Tenth Plan (2001) and the Right to Education Act, 2009. Undoubtedly an important milestone in India's struggle to achieve the elusive Education for All goal, the Act provided the much needed patronage for education of children with special needs as well (Madan & Sharma, 2013).

While there appears to be wholehearted policy support for inclusion on the surface, a closer examination leads one to the possibility of its multiple interpretations. For instance, Singal (2006) points towards how inclusive education can be interpreted as an 'alternative system of education' in addition to the NIOS and the NFE programmes already available to children with disabilities. In her view, while there is emphasis on including children with disabilities into the education system, it does not necessarily imply the mainstream. Several studies conducted in private schools implementing inclusive education programmes (Sandhill & Singh, 2005); Singal & Rouse (2003); Madan & Sharma (2013) have found schools creating separate units, referred to as Resource Rooms for admitting children with disabilities. Such an arrangement in the name of inclusion not only creates physical barriers between the children, but also restricts their participation in educational and co-curricular activities in the mainstream. Several such evidences indicate that even though support for inclusive education in India looks promising in policy, there is wide incongruity in its interpretations and practice.

Adopting inclusive practices at school level

In this light, it would perhaps be germane for schools to develop an informed understanding of inclusion on their own and discover how they could participate in making their school environments inclusive. The author calls for involvement of both private and public players in the process as participation in this national agenda is a responsibility that everyone must share equally. The importance of school in empowering and playing a mitigating factor in the lives of children with special needs has been found by several researchers in India and elsewhere (Chhuakling, 2010; Conners & Stalker, 2003; Vyas, 2008 as cited in Sharma & Sen, 2012). Having said that, it is imperative for schools to understand that an inclusive education programme in a school cannot exist as an appendage. It requires holistic involvement and participation of school personnel at all levels of administration and academic decision making. Unless a school wholeheartedly embraces the ideology in principle and in practice, it is unlikely to meet with success.

There is often a tendency for schools to view adopting inclusive practices as an added burden, something that saddles them with increased challenges for developing separate curriculum and learning new teaching techniques. This view presumably arises from the belief that working with children with special needs involves specialist pedagogy that teachers must learn in order to work with them. In turn, this understanding has evolved from the widely prevalent deficit versus the differential model which views children with disabilities as being qualitatively different from other children. Recent developments in the field founded on empirical research however suggest

that instead of emphasizing on adopting distinctive teaching approaches, educators should focus on embracing teaching practices that are adaptations of existing ones and could benefit all the children in the classroom and not just those with special needs. As Florian (2009) puts it, "a pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners is based on principles of teaching and learning that reject deficit views of difference and deterministic views about ability but see individual differences as part of the human condition" (p. 49). In the same vein, recommendations have been forthcoming for differentiated instruction and classrooms. In such instruction according to Waldron and McLeskey (2001), the teacher creates different levels of expectations and task completion using the same lesson or unit. Such a classroom is responsive to varying readiness levels, profiles and interests of all its pupils. There is, of course, no denying the fact that children with severe impairments may not benefit from this approach and may need intervention beyond the classroom.

It must be noted here that, in addition to addressing needs of children with mild disabilities who are excluded from the mainstream, inclusive pedagogy also benefits hundreds of children already present in regular classrooms who are affected by mild to moderate learning difficulties which go largely undetected and untreated. These children carry the risk of becoming dropouts due to poor school performance and may suffer from irreparable psychological and emotional trauma throughout their growing up years besides never being able to achieve academic success.

An inclusive school therefore, is one that accepts a value system that celebrates diversity, respects individual differences among its pupils and adopts teaching practices that profit all the children in the classroom and not just those with special needs. By taking lead in this endeavour, schools that express a sense of ownership towards implementing inclusive practices will not only imprint their participation in the Education for All goal but will also pave the way for others to follow. Let there be no doubt that inclusion is the way forward for this country to provide quality and meaningful education to all its children, and participation in this national agenda is no longer a matter of choice.

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The Gifted Child's Right to Education

Anitha Kurup

India's commitment to provide free and compulsory elementary education was demonstrated after the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE Act 2009) was enacted. Today, every child is entitled to quality education at the elementary school level. With the growing recognition that no two individuals are the same, the formal schooling system in India has to gear towards meeting the needs of children who come from diverse backgrounds. By the RTE Act, 2009, the schooling system in India is compelled to embrace inclusive education as a philosophy and approach and demonstrate the same through practice. Inclusive education encompasses gender, scheduled castes and tribes, religious minority, physical and learning disability, and the gifted and talented.

Including all children up to 14 years in the formal education system in India is an uphill task. In the crisis of serious resource crunch, it may appear hard to argue for resources for a gifted education programme. Conceding equal educational opportunities for all is important. Advocates of gifted education argue that these provisions are not adequate to meet the needs of the gifted children. Therefore it is imperative that the state not absolve its responsibility of catering to the needs of the gifted children as this will hurt the gifted children of the poor the most.

Individual differences exist and can be an outcome of a complex set of factors like intelligence, creativity, ability, environment, genetic, nutrition, social and cultural among others which have serious educational implications. All children are equal in their right to receive appropriate education, however, what constitutes an appropriate education is not the same for all children born in a calendar year. For an effective teacher, she/he will have to move beyond the one-size fit curriculum and address the individual differences to ensure learning for every child. In other words, it is the gifted and talented students who are the most ill-served when curriculum and instruction are not differentiated.

Haub and Sharma referred to India as a "collection of many countries held together by a common destiny and successful democracy" (2006, p. 3). There are 193 million school-aged children between 6 and 14 years (Mehta, 2007). Assuming normal probability, gifted children would comprise approximately 3% of the population, translating to about 6 million. The numbers alone pose a huge challenge for developing a comprehensive national program. Additionally, seventy percent of the population of India resides in villages. By and large this population has a lower educational status, higher poverty and less access to modern amenities (Haub & Sharma, 2006). The differential access to resources and knowledge of issues of different groups prevent the development of alliances that could help in proactively changing the context of education for the gifted in the country.

India has made some sporadic efforts in the past to promote high ability students in Science and Maths. In 1986, India sought to improve the overall quality of education, particularly for rural Indian and other minority populations, by introducing the Navodaya Vidyalaya Scheme (Wright, 2008). In addition, annual national-level tests such as the National Talent Search, olympiads in mathematics and science, the Kishore Vigyanik Prothsahan Yojna scholarship and other talent search programs have been introduced. These tests measure acquired knowledge and skills. Often the gifted and talented children are left out from such selection process as

they may not "…. fall into nice, neat stereotype(s) of good test takers and lesson learners" (Renzulli, 2005; p.80).

Gifted children are those who demonstrate higher ability or potential for higher ability as compared to others of their age-group. This ability more importantly reflects a need: gifted children need advanced material to satisfy their advanced academic development.

The concept of giftedness is still debated among researchers in the field of gifted education. While there is no universal definition of giftedness, there are several definitions proposed by Francoys Gagne, Joseph Sternberg, and Howard Gardner. One of the most popular models of giftedness is Renzulli's Three-Ring Model, which includes:

a) **Well-above average ability:** Ability (intelligence) needs to be above average, but, need not be exceptional. Ability is conceptualised in terms of standard deviations in IQ scores.

b) **Creativity:** is the ability to associate unlike ideas, think analytically and divergently and propose unusual solutions that are appropriate. Creativity is crucial to achievement in any field: achievement means beyond memorization to using the acquired knowledge to develop a new product or idea.

c) **Task commitment:** is the ability to work hard to acquire knowledge and skills in a particular domain of interest. Renzulli mentions perseverance, resilience, passion with the topic, vision, and sensitivity to human concerns as some behavioral and psychological correlates of task commitment.

While there is no one definition of giftedness, researchers agree on common characteristics of gifted children:

1. rapid learner
2. interest in novel, complex and challenging problems
3. high language ability and advanced vocabulary; an avid reader
4. high energy: may be restless; may be bored by routine tasks
5. curiosity: asks unusual questions ('why' and 'what if') and performs independent explorations
6. metacognitive skills/associative thinking: identifies connections between ideas from different areas; e.g. when learning a concept in class, associates it with a phenomenon she/he has observed in real life
7. creativity: generates new formulae to solve math, offer unusual responses to a question
8. persistence and motivation to excel in area of interest (marks/competition, may not motivate gifted children)
9. ability to grasp advanced concepts
10. hypothetical thinking, philosophical, and ethical concerns

A gifted child may show only some of these characteristics. The National Association For Gifted Children (NAGC, U.S.) recognises giftedness in broad areas: academic, general or specific intellectual ability, creativity, leadership, visual/performing arts or music, and psychomotor abilities.

Unfortunately, the curriculum and practice of the typical Indian classroom is geared towards the average learner through lecture-based teaching and written exam-based assessment encouraging memorization. Within such a system, the possibility of recognizing gifted children is limited. Very often, teachers mistake the high achievers in tests as gifted.

Research in the field of giftedness reveals that there is a large proportion of children who may be gifted cope poorly with a structured classroom, dislike writing, perform poorly in exams, ask unusual questions, or propose unusual ways to solve problems thereby disturbing the regular classroom. Teachers often recognize these children as trouble makers. Even in cases when a gifted child is recognized (not as a gifted child, but one who is a fast learner), the teacher generally leaves that child to his/her own devices or asks him/her to help a weaker student.

Contrary to the belief that gifted children can 'manage on their own', research suggests that like all children, gifted children need appropriate

stimulation, challenge and support to fulfill their potential. Unless the school curriculum meets gifted children's advanced educational needs, they may display the following problems:

a. **Behavioral problems in class:** boredom, restlessness, disciplinary issues, frequently skipping school.

b. **Poor socio-emotional adjustment:** gifted children may feel left out, hide their abilities to fit in with their peers, get bullied, or may wonder 'what's wrong with me?' and stay aloof.

c. **Poor work habits:** unless gifted children are adequately challenged in school from a young age, they may develop poor work habits. For many gifted children, secondary school or college is the first time they face a challenging curriculum or peers of equal ability. When this happens, they may conclude that they were wrong about their intelligence ('I thought I was smart, but I can't cope with this curriculum so, I will never be able to do this, so there's no point trying'), and may never fulfill their potential.

These problems are not inherent to gifted children; rather, they arise when a child has advanced cognitive needs which the regular classroom does not satisfy.

Conclusion

In the absence of a national programme of gifted education, India loses an opportunity to tap the talent of these young minds that can contribute to the growth and development of the nation. The country has recognized this and has initiated a national programme in 2010 to develop tools for identification of the gifted children in Science and Mathematics (3-15 years). The programme was initiated by the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to Government of India: NIAS anchors the programme with two other collaborators- Delhi University and Agastya Foundation. Multiple tools using quantitative and qualitative methods are developed and have been validated. While the research groups work on further validation of the identification methods, efforts are made for mentoring the gifted children.

The task is enormous and more groups need to join this national effort. There are local efforts promoted by Jagdish Bose National Talent Search, Kolkata; Jyana Probhodini in Pune; research in gifted education led by Prof. Krishna Maitra of Delhi University among many others. However there is a need to expand to create more groups in other parts of the country such that there is a national movement of gifted education.

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Inclusion in Private Unaided Schools: Has RtE Paved the Way?

Archana Mehendale and Rahul Mukhopadhyay

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (henceforth RTE Act), has been, within its relatively short lifespan so far, both hailed and pilloried by educationists, policy makers, civil society actors, institutional representatives from private and government school systems, and parents' groups. The '25 per cent provision' for inclusion of marginalised children in private schools under Section 12 (1) (c) of the Act has generated considerable public debate and media attention, and led to sharply polarised positions among different sections of society. At an official level, the provision has been defended on the grounds of ensuring inclusion of the marginalised children in the private schools that are perceived as schools offering better 'quality education' and on the premise that the private schools must also contribute to the national goal of universalising education. Private schools, in particular, have challenged this provision in the Courts. In April 2012, in *Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan v. Union of India*[1] , the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the Act and directed private schools, both unaided and non-minority, to implement this provision. Subsequently, in May 2014, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held that RTE Act shall not apply to minority schools[2]. Thus, the provision requiring private schools to provide free and compulsory education to 25 per cent of their grade 1/pre-primary students does not apply to minority institutions.

Karnataka notified its rules under the RTE Act soon after the Supreme Court judgment and was one of the first states in the country to also implement this provision. But there was an absence of any systematic research both on how the 25 per cent provision was being mediated by the Government, private schools, and the direct beneficiaries namely, children and families, and on what the key implementation issues were. Hence, we chose to undertake a small exploratory study[3] in Bangalore and Delhi, during academic year 2012-13, to understand both the coherence in the norms and processes laid down by the respective governments to implement the provision, and the experiences of the different key stakeholders with facilitating inclusion in schools through this provision. The data for the study was collected primarily through structured questionnaires and observation schedules at the school and classroom level, and semi-structured interviews with head teachers, teachers, parents, education officials, monitoring agencies and civil society activists. In this article, we primarily focus on our main findings emerging from Bangalore.

Procedures

Accessibility: Karnataka is one of the few states where circulars and notifications are posted on the website for easy accessibility. Information about the quota of seats available in schools was not available in the form of a map but only as a list, making it impractical to identify a school in one's neighbourhood. Although a toll-free helpline

[1] *See, (2012) 6 SCC1*

[2] *Pramati Educational and Cultural Trust & Ors versus Union of India & Ors (Writ Petition (C) No 416 of 2012).*

[3] *This study was done by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences with the Azim Premji University and the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion with support from Oxfam. For full report, see: http://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/wp-inclusion-of-marginalised-children-in-private-unaided-schools-190314-en.pdf*

(1-800-425-11004) to handle RTE complaints was set up, no information was found to be displayed on the website.

Eligibility requirements: The income ceiling of Rs. 3.5 lakhs prescribed for the 'weaker sections' was challenged in the High Court by petitioners K. Nagesh and two students belonging to families below poverty line, as being too high. A Government Order was issued stating that preference would be given to those with income less than Rs. 1 lakh. However, this has not evoked much confidence as it is feared that the better off families will corner the benefits and the extent to which this would lead to inclusion of the economically most deserving remains questionable. The classification of disadvantaged children does not address the problem of multiple disadvantages and currently procedures are lacking in terms of defining, selecting and prioritising children with multiple disadvantages. While the prerequisite of certification for admissions is necessary for effective targeting, it overlooks the realities of specific sub-groups within the marginalised, such as the orphans, migrant and street children, who are unable to produce such certification. As a result, children belonging to these sub-groups were not found to be availing benefits of this provision and official records do not even capture admissions of children belonging to these sub-groups.

The regulatory discrepancies have become an easy route for fostering malpractices resulting in 'elite-capture' that characterise most targeted government interventions aimed at excluded populations. Even in this short period of its implementation, the Karnataka Private Schools Joint Action Committee has alleged that 40 per cent of income certificates provided to the schools are false while the Karnataka Lokayukta has ordered a probe into the fake income certificate racket.

Neighbourhood: The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) on neighbourhood are flexible about the definition of neighbourhood for admissions of children in private schools who apply under the general category. However, the distance norm is strictly prescribed for those availing seats under the 25 per cent provision. In the case of private schools located in urban up-market socio-geographic locations and those located in lowly populated suburban peripheries, there is hardly any residential neighbourhood and such schools by default bypass requirements to adhere to the 25 per cent provision and thus remain exclusive.

School reports: Accountability of schools implementing the provision is sought by way of half-yearly compliance reports to be submitted to the government. However, the format (Form 3) prescribed for the report is itself discriminatory. Among other things, it requires information on children's school performance (to be specified as grade attained ranging from A+ to C), provision of special training for children securing poor grades, number of children detained and the basis of such a detention (attendance, performance or both or discipline) and any serious complaints that the school may have to the parents about 'children's schooling habits'. This presupposes that children admitted under the 'RTE quota' are likely to perform poorly and although detention is prohibited under RTE Act, a child could possibly be kept behind on grounds of poor attendance, performance or discipline. Interestingly, the format allows for schools to record their complaints to parents about children's 'schooling habits' but there is no opportunity for parents to give feedback about the school's performance on inclusion as part of the compliance report. These compliance protocols require serious reconsideration, given that they are one of the main tools to ensure accountability (other than financial reports and audits) of schools.

Question of reimbursements and high fees: Compounding such blinkered positions are the problems associated with the lack of any transparent mechanism to discern the per-child expenses actually incurred by the private schools and, therefore, the discrepancies that arise between government reimbursements and the actual per-child school costs. Many of the schools reported charging fees from students admitted to free seats for stationery, sports, uniform, maintenance and administrative charges although

the rules prescribe that the schools bear these costs. Likewise, parents claimed that they had to spend additional money for purchase of uniforms, tuition, books and textbooks in the range of Rs. 300 to 15,000 per annum. A number of parents even said they were told to pay 50 per cent of the fees, with the government paying the remaining, and some schools actually charging the parents in advance with an assurance that the fees paid would be reimbursed against the amount reimbursed by the government. Private school managements claimed that they had received much less than what they had expected as reimbursement of school fees in the first installment, a likely outcome in the absence of a transparent process for the declaration and discernment of per-child school expenses and its independent audit by governmental authorities.

The fixing of the amount for pre-primary education was arbitrary by the government's own admission and was a figure derived at by halving the amount for Grade 1. This was also due to the fact that the government had no figure on which they could base the reimbursement amount, given that the Department of Education does not run pre-schools.

Are schools becoming inclusive?

Admissions across social categories: A review of statistical data for admissions under the 25 per cent provision in 2012-13 and 2013-14 showed that among the social categories, the highest proportion of those admitted belonged to Other Backward Classes (58, 69) followed by Scheduled Castes (39, 28) and Scheduled Tribes (3, 3). For these two academic years, schools that had no children from among the Scheduled Castes were 31 and 25 per cent respectively. The corresponding figures for schools which had no enrolments from Scheduled Tribes was 86 and 77 per cent, and for Other Backward Classes 24 and 7 per cent respectively. Schools which had no enrolments from either the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes for 2012-13 and 2013-14 were 28 and 22 per cent respectively[4].

Social distance: It is true that classroom observations and interactions with head teachers and teachers in the private schools covered under the study did not reveal any immediate concerns on discrimination. This was, however, attributed to social adjustments among the children in the lower grades and an apparent non-cognition of social differences due to their young age. Many teachers were quick to point out the onerous financial and material efforts that parents of the children enrolled under the 25 per cent provision had to undertake to ensure that their child would not 'feel different' from the other children in the school. In the same breath, these teachers cautioned how 'adjustment' problems are likely to surface as children move to higher grades and start recognising social differences in their immediate peer-group interactions. One of the most common refrain from private school head teachers was that of foreseeable humiliation and loss of self-esteem for families whose children were being admitted under the 25 per cent provision in allegedly totally alien school settings. For example, one of the head teacher from a private school in Bangalore, known to cater to the affluent sections of the city's population, remarked, 'Suppose there is swimming pool, canteen facility in the school, and all is paid; then what will be the mental condition of that kid when kid will see his classmates using all those facilities?'. Most respondents from the managements expressed concerns about the ability of the students to cope, and ideas of social distance and paternalism came across strongly (see Box 1).

Homogenous classes: In order to ensure classes remain homogenous, some schools had

Box 1: What some respondents from School Management said:

'I don't quite know how useful this is. We have so many extra-curricular activities like taekwondo and other sports that are conducted in our school. Many of our school children intend to take up these activities very seriously. What are the RTE children going to do with such activities? Do you think they would pursue it further? My children represent the school and also take national level exams in taekwondo –

[4] *Based on data shared by RTE Cell, Department of Education, Government of Karnataka.*

would the RtE kids take it up that seriously?'

'I don't think this is useful for us. I don't think we could gain anything from them. Maybe they could gain something from us. I am not sure though'.

'RTE is good, at least those children can learn something otherwise earlier they were growing like animals'.

'It is difficult to improve these children as they don't know anything and are dirty'.

encouraged students who were already selected and admitted to 'apply' for the 'scholarship' under RtE. Parents of such children were counseled and requested to 'fulfill' the eligibility and admissions requirements. Such schools declared receiving the exact number of applications as the number of seats available in the school and thereby maintained status quo on admissions already made. Given that we studied the implementation in its first year, some of these schools admitted that they had to resort to these mechanisms as there were no applications and they did not want to falter on their obligations.

Measures for inclusion: Our study also showed that 'inclusion' was seen as a 'problem' of integrating 'others' into the school and the RtE an effort 'to help poor children to study in private schools which is otherwise unaffordable'. For none of the higher-end private schools, was the potential of a socially diverse student population for a transformation of their existing homogenous education outlook ever voiced. Not surprisingly, very few schools surveyed had taken any specific measures to facilitate inclusion of children and these were also minimalistic or symbolic, rather than being comprehensive and substantive. Some of these measures included: keeping the identity of the children enrolled under the 25 per cent provision confidential, providing supplementary classes to these children after school hours, and organising workshops on nutrition with the parents of these children. However, none of the teachers were familiar with the relevant provisions under the RtE, or had been trained or oriented to handle diversity in the class, either by the government or by the school management. Even among the parents who had managed to get their children admitted under this provision, there was a lack of awareness about the nature of their entitlements. Schools reported that parents hardly participated in the Parents-Teachers Associations.

Monitoring: Given the media publicity and awareness programmes conducted by civil society organisations, a few parents had lodged complaints with the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights about schools not providing admission forms and schools charging additional fees. The Commission has dealt with these matters by referring them to the Department or by making recommendations through a process of public hearing. However, the Commission has not made any broad policy recommendations to the government on fostering inclusion.

Conclusion

The implementation of the RtE Act and the 25 per cent provision is in its initial stages. The larger goal of inclusion which was intended by the law makers remains distant as the bureaucracy is trying to balance contestations from private schools by first ensuring that they throw their doors open and provide admissions. Although admissions may be the first step, it cannot be seen as a proxy to inclusion which requires a fundamental change in the way schools are structured and learning takes place. The state government needs to streamline and strengthen its systems of implementing this provision, make it more accessible, transparent and open for social audit at every layer.

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Gender Inequities in School Teaching: Reasons and Repercussions

Jyothsna Latha Belliappa

Through much of the 20th and 21st centuries in India, women entered the teaching profession in fairly significant numbers. There are many reasons for this. At the level of government policy it was decided that to increase enrolment of girls in school there should ideally be at least one female teacher in every primary school. To further this goal, many teacher training centres were set up exclusively for women and female teachers were given incentives to work in remote areas (Manjrekar, 2013). In addition to government policies, societal beliefs and practices have also tended to support the entry of women into teaching. Amongst the middle classes, teaching is viewed as a suitable profession for women because it is seen to be less demanding, (having shorter hours than many other jobs) and therefore compatible with household and childcare responsibilities. During my own career as a school teacher, I was often complimented on my choice of profession as an 'ideal job for a woman'.

As a result of societal values and government policies, the proportion of women in school teaching is fairly high. DISE data for 2012-13 indicates that about 50% of all primary school teachers and approximately 40% of all secondary school teachers in India are women (data for regular or permanent rather than contract teachers). Earlier analytical reports published by DISE for 2008-09 estimate that 66.15% of primary school teachers in urban areas and 37.2% of primary school teachers in rural areas are women. The question arises, does women's pre-dominance in numbers result in greater gender equity in the profession? Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

For one, as the above statistics indicate, women are concentrated in primary school teaching while men tend to be represented in larger numbers in high school. Often, the reason given for this is that women are better able to care for and nurture young children, given their 'natural' mothering instinct. In contrast to primary school teachers, high school teachers are subject specialists and often have postgraduate degrees. Consequently high school teaching tends to be more prestigious and better paid. But the 'naturalization' of the specialized knowledge and skills required to teach young children is highly problematic.

In a talk given in Bangalore in 2012, Professor Krishna Kumar, the eminent educationist and scholar, argued that teachers perform certain 'civilizational functions' which are intrinsic to the reproduction of society. They teach children to represent sensory experiences in words, to notice their surroundings and to communicate with others. All children learn in primary school to name fruit, vegetables and animals, to identify shapes, colours and everyday objects, to build on the vocabulary acquired at home. Some even learn a language that is not spoken at home. Thus, the job of primary school teachers, in addition to teaching the three 'R', s is to enable children to become social beings.

Such a delicate and important task requires careful planning and preparation. Primary school teachers need to create charts, diagrams and 3D models that will stimulate the curiosity and engage the minds of their students. They need to think of simple illustrative examples to convey abstract ideas in a language appropriate to their students' age and context. They attempt to individualize their lessons to cater to diverse learning needs. By suggesting that these specialized skills are 'natural' to women, we not only undervalue the training that enables

them to perform their role effectively, but also suggest that men are ill equipped to do so.

During my early days as a primary school teacher I worked with an exceptionally gifted male colleague who was visiting India from Denmark. A talented musician and poet, he often brought his guitar into the classroom, composing songs to teach concepts in geography, science and history. As a class teacher, he forged close bonds with the students, celebrating not only their birthdays but also his own with songs and music and bringing his infant son to school to meet his students. Needless to say, the children enjoyed his classes, and grew very fond of their teacher. But more importantly, he taught them to appreciate a more caring, gentle sort of masculinity that thrives in the company of young children. Unfortunately, after he left, the primary section went back to being a largely female space with male teachers being confined to the high school or the physical education department and conventional masculine and feminine stereotypes began to re-emerge in the hidden curriculum of the school.

As I mentioned earlier, teaching is believed to be ideal for combining paid work and household responsibilities given the long vacations and shorter hours than most other white collar professions. Such a view fails to account for the work that teachers carry home in the form of 'corrections' (assessing and marking students' work) and preparation. While teachers do get home early, their hours extend late into the evening as they mark and grade students' work. One retired teacher whom I interviewed as part of my on-going research project on the professional identities of school teachers in Bangalore claimed that she used to regularly wake up at three in the morning to mark the notebooks of her 77 students! In addition to marking, the preparatory work that I mentioned earlier often takes place after school hours.

In the 1970s, feminist sociologist, Ann Oakley argued that housework, which is performed by women after their husbands and children leave (for the office and school), is rendered invisible and therefore devalued by the family and society. Similarly, the extent of work that teachers do on assessment and preparation is rarely acknowledged by students, their parents and school administrators; like housework it is performed at home and therefore 'invisibilized'. Like other women who undertake paid employment, teachers become skilled at multi-tasking, cooking, cleaning and supervising their own children's homework whilst completing their corrections and preparations for the next day's lesson. A research project undertaken by my colleagues S. Indumathi and Indira Vijaysimha amongst both male and female teachers a few years ago found that the former often spent their time after school hours on sports, leisure activities and socializing with friends while the latter tended to catch up on housework. It is easy to deduce who has more time for professional development activities.

This brings me to my last point, that there are very few women in leadership positions in education. With the exception of private all-girls' schools, one rarely sees women as school principals. Given their family responsibilities women rarely have the time to develop their skills or augment their qualifications to prepare for managerial positions. Many women begin and end their careers as classroom teachers, with only some variations in the age-group or the subjects that they teach. As a result, schools end up mirroring conventionally gendered authority structures of the family and community, where power is vested largely in the hands of men. Not only does this undermine female teachers' authority in the classroom, it also reinforces traditional masculinity and femininity with men engaged in leadership and women in nurturing roles.

If the primary purpose of education is to bring about social change, and enable students to question taken-for granted assumptions about the world, then the skewed representation of men and women in different areas of school teaching needs to be challenged. Sincere efforts must be made to recruit women into high school teaching and to make primary school teaching attractive to men. Both male and female teachers should be sensitized to avoid reinforcing conventional gender stereotypes in the classroom and women need to be encouraged to take up leadership positons in education and

given adequate training to do so. If such measures are taken up seriously and consistently we will, in the next ten to fifteen years, not only bring about greater gender equity in the teaching profession and challenge the gendered division of labour in schooling, but also enable the younger generation to take a more inclusive view of the roles of men and women in education, in childcare and more generally in adult life.

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Preparing Teachers for Social Justice - An Experience in Karnataka

Mythili Ramchand[1]

Teacher preparation can be a "dynamic vehicle" in the cause of promoting social justice (Hansen, 2008). Social justice may be a philosophically contested and normative concept (Goodlad, 2002). But then to Rawls "justice is the first virtue of social institutions" (Rawls, 1971; p.3). Also Novak (2000) argues that social justice is a virtue ascribed to the "reflective and deliberative acts" of individuals (quoted in Grant & Agosto, 2008; p.98).

In a stratified society based on vertical hierarchies such as ours, teacher education offers a glimmer of hope by means of engaging prospective teachers in critically reflecting on issues of discrimination and consciously attempting to adapt inclusive pedagogies. Hitherto, schooling has been a factor in perpetuating inequities with not only a wide variety of schools, of differing qualities, catering to children from different classes but also insensitive pedagogies and ill thought out curricula (Kumar 1989; Nambissan & Rao, 2013).

The Right of children to free and compulsory Education Act, 2009 is an attempt to ensure that every child (at least in the age group of 6-14 years) receives 'quality'education, with the parameters of quality spelt out. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 and the related position papers (NCERT, 2005) have widened the discourse on curricular issues and more importantly the stress on meaning making places the onus on teachers to ensure that every child in her class is able to meaningfully process the schooling experiences.[2] The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCTE,2009) provides pointers for preparing teachers to don this role.

The revised Diploma in Education (D.Ed.) Curriculum of Karnataka has attempted to spell out the vision of NCFTE, 2009 by means of introducing inclusive education as a permeating philosophy across the curriculum. Inclusive education is conceived from a wider perspective of social justice. According to UNESCO (2008), inclusive education is a process of strengthening the ability of the schooling system to cater to the needs of every child. Rather than children adapting to schools, the system (of which teachers form a crucial part) has to transform to meet children's needs.

This article briefly outlines what went into the curriculum and the associated materials, and shares the experiences gained from piloting the materials with a small group of student teachers.

Curriculum and material development on inclusive education for the D.Ed. programme

"Laws, polices and rules are created to serve a liberal ideology but planted and left to grow in a culture opposed to egalitarian ethos they subscribe to" (Juneja,2011;p.165). Hence the challenge was to translate the egalitarian aspirations of the recent laws and policies, including NCFTE 2009 vision of teacher education, into ground reality.

[1] *I thank Ruma Banerjee for convincing me to get involved in inclusive education and for sustained partnership in the work related to this area.*

[2] *For the historically underprivileged, schooling not only provides meaningless experiences but also actively perpetuates feelings of poor self esteem and hegemonic values. This has been well documented. (See for example: Krishna Kumar's (1989) observation of a tribal boy's experience in a social studies class or Murali Krishna's 'Pedagogic Practice and the Violence Against Dalits in Schooling' in Sleeter et al, 2012). Also, for children with disabilities, the experience has been segregation even where 'integration' was attempted (Saxena, 2012).*

The Curriculum preparation was a consultative process.[3] A consensus emerged that while inclusive education must permeate across the curriculum, student teachers must also gain a conceptual understanding. Accordingly, inclusive education is introduced as a unit in the education studies course. The unit deals with the conceptual bases of inclusive education; identifying barriers to inclusion and ways and means of overcoming them; celebrating diversity as a resource; and pointers towards creating inclusive learning environments.

The team that drafted the curriculum was also involved in preparing a handbook for teacher educators and reading materials for student teachers.

The following pointers were kept in mind while preparing student teachers' reading material (Nawani, 2010; p.158):

- meeting the pedagogic needs of the curriculum
- addressing the developmental needs of student teachers
- catering to their socio-cultural contexts
- meeting the demands of the learning context

Literature on inclusive education is vast and varied. It was a challenging task to put it across in a form comprehensible to student teachers and contextualize the content to their socio-cultural background (Mythili, 2011). After many iterations in the course of external consultations and internal meetings, the draft material was readied. The broad approach to the text was to keep the style conversational, posing a variety of questions to reflect on, and illustrating issues and ideas with vignettes, newspaper articles and short biographies.

Piloting the reading material with select student teachers[4]

The next phase was to try-out the draft material with twenty student teachers of three D.Ed. Colleges in Bangalore.

The nature of engagement was primarily dialogic. The reading material was augmented with other relevant articles/chapters from books and film clippings. The sessions included extensive discussions, either in small groups or as an entire class. The student teachers were also given written assignments in the form of open-ended questionnaires, responding to contextual questions and essays.

The discussions and the written assignments provided a window into their beliefs and perceptions. For instance, beliefs about labeling children as 'smart', 'dull' based on intelligence (again as perceived from marks in exams) appeared deep rooted, where as perceptions about caste were diverse, ranging from nuanced understandings of socio historical factors to entrenched prejudices that Dalit children are less intelligent/ irregular to school etc. Also there appeared to be widespread acceptance of social hierarchy. We decided to "explore the possibilities of seeing what is obscured by the familiar, so much a part of the everyday that it escapes notice entirely", as Maxine Greene urges. These explorations were framed by the teacher capacities for social justice suggested by Grant & Agosto (2008):

1. Commitment to inquiry based critical pedagogy
2. Forming communities of practice and collaboration
3. Engaging in reflective practice
4. Developing critical social awareness

These capacities need time and sustained efforts to develop. In our engagement of 30 hours with the student teachers, we were able to provide them with a brief experience on inquiry based critical pedagogy; suggestions for engaging in reflective practice; and underlined the importance of forming

[3] *The Position Paper on Inclusive Education (Banerjee et al, 2013) provided the basis for the consultations.*

[4] *This activity was taken up as part of a collaborative project with DSERT and financial grant from UNICEF.*

communities of practice and developing critical social awareness.[5] This effort has to be extended across the teacher education programme with teacher educators giving coherent messages. Additionally, initial hand holding and mentoring support is required for fresh teacher recruits[6], if the ideas and theories of social justice is to be put into practice. Also teacher educators have to be sensitised to the discomfort student teachers face when questioning knowledge about themselves, their relation to others or the world (Kumashiro, 2008). Most importantly teacher educators need to consciously develop the capacities they aspire in their student teachers.

While teachers' capacities need to be built and their vision is needed for "emancipatory teaching" (Hammerness et al, 2005), as Poonam Batra (2014) cautions teachers should not become "objects of reform". Teachers are part of the system and while teacher education needs to play a significant role in empowering them, policies and laws have to ensure institutional structures that do not undermine teacher autonomy. Also Amman Madan (2013) points out that the relation between schooling and school structure is complex and requires a "nuanced understanding" (p. 138). Work on social justice and teacher education in our country must foster such an understanding.

"Education is linked to freedom to the ability to see but also to alter, to understand but also to reinvent, to know and also to transform the world" (Ayers 2004,p.21). Both individuals and institutes need to develop "adaptive expertise" (Grant & Agosto 2008) if schooling has to ensure this education.

[5] *We found that while the reading material was adequate in developing some perspectives related to discriminations; clarifying a few concepts, such as intelligence; and appreciate the need to develop an inclusive learning environment, some of the vignettes and activities suggested seemed to reinforce their existing beliefs and prejudices. We are in the process of revisiting these sections. Also, in her review of our material, Jane Sahi has pointed out that social justice issues should not be super imposed from an external perspective. The engagement with student teachers has given us insights to communicate the issues more organically, emerging for the student teachers' concerns and beliefs.*

[6] *A study we took up as part of the UNICEF funded project, shows deeply entrenched beliefs on inclusion among teachers of both Government and Private schools. Even if we assume a robust teacher preparation programme that can develop teacher capacities for social justice, newly appointed teachers would need strong convictions and enormous confidence, to translate these into practice, in existing schools. This is where a more proactive role by teacher education institutes would be crucial in helping build communities of practice among alumni and much needed mentoring support.*

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RtE Act and Inclusive and Discrimination-Free Schools

Nadim Ali Haider Khan

Children being non-essential or a weak constituency have no 'ballot value' for policy makers and perhaps this is one of the reasons why it took so long to legislate on universal elementary education. They are non-actors and have very little room to negotiate in an indirect and representative democracy. Despite the fact that children are the only beneficiaries of this fundamental right, they are often at the receiving end. It makes evolution of an inclusive education system a very difficult task. Their needs are often conceived from the point of view of parents, families, caste, tribes, community and society, who generally are carriers of ethos, values, mores and culture but not the only ones. They may not necessarily always be in sync with the constitutional ethos and usually patriarchal, feudal, caste-ist and communal/religious and are based on exclusion and largely discriminatory in nature. The Position Paper on SC and ST and Girl's Education, by NCF-NCERT and Justice Rajindar Sachar Commission's Reports attest that SC, ST, religious minorities and girl child are subjected to discriminatory practices in elementary schools leading to low enrollment and high dropout.

The Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RtE Act) is enacted to universalise elementary education for children irrespective of their caste, class, gender, religious and other socio-cultural and economic identities. It intends to promote and provide discrimination free schools and empowers the community and local bodies for monitoring, addressing, preventing and remedying discrimination in schools.

The question of inclusion in schools can be looked from various stand points: social demography (I prefer to call it neighborhood centered view), identification, classification and categorisation of children, representation, participation, content, curriculum and pedagogy, and finance points of views. All points of views are very important for a holistic appreciation of RtE Act vis- a -vis inclusion.

Firstly, the nature of neighbourhood, that is to say one marked by caste, class, religious or ethnic segregation, will determine the nature of neighbourhood schools. Therefore, a pertinent question follows that does RtE Act intent to address the question of social and demographic segregation through schools and how? Without addressing this effectively, would it not make the school a space for segregation instead of a syncretic space? Secondly, how far will 25% reservation in private schools ensure representation of children belonging to disadvantaged groups (henceforth C-DG) and weaker sections (henceforth C-WS) and help universalize elementary education irrespective of class and category of schools and make private and neighbourhood schools inclusive? Thirdly, the participation will add a bottom-up understanding to the school system. The nature of participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders will shape the school, create a model of community ownership and connect to their aspirations. The framework of RtE Act provides for spaces of participation in form of School Management Committee (SMC), local bodies, school development plan, community monitoring, and social audit. However the question at this stage is about the process of community participation: in what manner will such processes question and negotiate the existing social, cultural and institutional structure and enable inclusive planning, monitoring?

Lastly, finances and resource allocation is a very important area of concern. The RtE Act is a very ambitious Act and comes with a challenge to sustain the financial inflow and to progressively increase the allocation. Accountability Initiative, of the Azim Premji Foundation on the basis of DISE Statistics 2009-10 and SSA financial reports highlighted the disparity between States with respect to annual per capita expenditure on primary education by state and central governments. On one hand Meghalaya and Kerala spend Rs. 23,000

and 19,000 respectively, whereas West Bengal spends only Rs. 3500. Per capita expenditure of only ten states is greater than the national average of Rs. 9500. The challenge is to equalise on one hand and to upgrade on the other.

Identification, classification, and categorisation of children: the idea of inclusion of children belonging from disadvantaged groups and children belonging from weaker sections

The RtE Act provides for free education up to standard 8th to C-DG and C-WS in all private schools except unaided minority schools and in specified schools such as Kendriya Vidyalaya, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, and Sainik Schools etc. Accordingly, these schools are required to reserve 25% of total available seats for C-DG and C-WS in Standard One [S. 12(1) (c) of RtE Act].

The RtE Act includes SC and ST children as two broad categories within C-DG and leaves it to State Governments to include socially and educationally backward groups or any group on the basis of social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic and gender related factors [S. 2(d)]. C-WS is classified on the basis of the income criteria decided by the State Governments [S. 2(e)]. Only fifteen states have classified C-DG and C-WS whereas all six union territories have adopted the Central Model Rules. Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir have not defined C-DG and the income criteria for C-WS. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of C-DG and CWS respectively and highlight the inconsistency in categorising C-DG and CWS.

It is interesting to note that only Andhra Pradesh (AP)

Table 1 - Groups within C-DGs

Disadvantaged Groups	State
SC and ST	All States and UTs
Backward Class	Karnataka, Gujarat, Tripura, Haryana, Rajasthan (income up to 2.5 lakh) and Uttarakhand and Delhi (excluding creamy layer)
Educationally backward Tribes	Nagaland
Orphan	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Manipur, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Nagaland
Children with Special Needs / Disabilities	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Delhi, Rajasthan, Delhi, Kerala and Uttarakhand
Migrant	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka
Street Children	Andhra Pradesh
HIV +ve children	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Manipur, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu and Nagaland
Below Poverty Line	Mizoram
Community in traditional occupation	Kerala
Children of Scavengers	Tamil Nadu
Transgender	Kerala and Tamil Nadu
Children >14 years having alter enrolment	Kerala
Child of widow/divorcee mother having <Rs. 80,000 annual income	Uttarakhand
Children of Disabled Parents/ HIV + parents having <Rs. 4.5 lakh annual income	Uttarakhand

Table 2 - Groups within C-WSs

Weaker Group/s	State
BPL	Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Mizoram, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Tripura
Orphan/ HIV+/ Child of War Widow, with Special Needs / Disability	Haryana
Nomadic Tribes and Denotified Tribes	Maharashtra
Religious Minority	Maharashtra
OBC and Special Backward class	Maharashtra
Backward Class, Minority and other class with annual income up to Rs. 60,000	Andhra Pradesh
ANNUAL INCOME	
<Rs. 40,000	Manipur, Nagaland
< 55000	Uttarakhand
< Notified Creamy Layer for BC	Karnataka
< 1 lakh	Delhi, Maharashtra
< 2 lakhs	Tamil Nadu
Rs. 2.5 Lakhs	Rajasthan

and Haryana provide for a formula of seat distribution amongst the C-DG and C-WS and according to Rule 9(4) of the AP Rule, 19% seats are earmarked for C-DGs including 10% to SC, 4% to ST and 5% to orphan, HIV+, children with disabilities, whereas the remaining 6% seats are reserved for C-WS inclusive of Minorities, BC and OC with an annual income up to Rs. 60,000. Similarly, provison to Rule 7(4) of Haryana Rule provides for 5% seats to SC, 4% to OBC Category-A and 2.5% to OBC Category-B. AP and Haryana Rule try to provide a mechanism to ensure access to education and representation to the most vulnerable children through stratified quota system.

The RtE Act intends to ensure discrimination-free schools. The government [Section 8 (c)] and local authority [S. 9 (c)] are duty bound to ensure every C-DG and C-WS in schools are not to be discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education. The Model RtE rule further obliges government and local authorities to ensure that every school is free from caste/class/religion/gender-based abuse [Rule 5(3), Model Rules]. Rule 5(3) of Manipur Rule and Rule 6(3) of Andhra Pradesh Rules expressly provide for protection against denial of admission to schools on grounds of caste, class, religion and gender. The Model Rule [Rule 5(4)] and State Rules [e.g. Rules 6(4) of the Andhra Pradesh Rule] has further elaborated the scope by specifically mandating the government and local authority to guarantee every such child protection against segregation and discrimination in classrooms, during mid-day meals, in the playground, in use of common drinking water and toilet facilities and cleaning of toilets and classrooms in all schools including government and aided private schools. Further Rule 7 of the Model Rule and Rule 8 of AP Rule mandate every unaided private schools and specified schools, neither to segregate such children in the classroom nor to hold their classes at different places and timings. They shall not be subjected to any discrimination in relation to entitlements and facilities including text-books, uniforms, library and ICT, extra-curricular activities and sports.

Conclusion and way forward

The question at the end is - will the new RTE regime emerge as a path breaker in synthesizing both public and private schools for cultivating citizenship and constitutional values? Or will it be just another brick in the wall? The next question follows from that how will it respond to the old challenges and new needs and balance between the two?

The present elementary education system doesn't have a definite and uniform mechanism to identify, address, monitor and remedy discrimination at this level. In the absence of which it is a felt need to evolve methodology and to introduce a mechanism based of specific quality indicators, to fulfill the aim of inclusive schools. In order to make institution of schools democratic, participative, inclusive and free from discrimination, institutions including the PRI will have to show the way. Education and school are both means and ends to achieve equity but education alone and of itself cannot be a path to emancipation. It has to be freed from the discriminatory ethos perpetuated by these institutions. Active citizenship will transform the institution of education to an active, inclusive and discrimination free institution and an active, inclusive and discrimination free institution of schools will progressively develop an active citizenship. This will not happen in isolation. A discourse on the issue for articulation and adoption of broad principles and criteria for identification of C-DG and C-WS could be a good starting point towards inclusive schools.

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The Indian Caste System and Consequent Challenges in Education for Historically Deprived and Disadvantaged Social Classes – How to Overcome the System and Meet its Challenges

P. S. Krishnan

I. Demographic dividend and its sine-qua-nons

The concept of demographic dividend is well-known. But in order to reap this opportunity and to prevent the demographic dividend from turning into a demographic nightmare, it is necessary to equip the population in the younger age-groups with good education, health and skills. This requires not only educational, health-related and skill-development facilities, but also enabling all social classes to avail themselves of these facilities by the removal of all obstacles that block these facilities from reaching deprived social classes.

II. The Indian caste system (ICS) with 'untouchability' – serious obstacle to reaping demographic dividend

One of the serious obstacles to this process is the traditional socio-economic structure and system of India or the Indian Caste System (ICS) or caste system-with-"Untouchability". This has prevented children and youth of a large part of the population from getting access to facilities and opportunities in every field including education. In order to understand this clearly and devise and design effective remedial measures, one must correctly understand the nature of the ICS from the point of view of the historically deprived and disadvantaged classes.

III. The ICS and its function and effect

The ICS is not merely a matter of whimsical customs and practices. It is a system of gradation, degradation, deprivation and exploitation, in which there is a hierarchy of occupations also. Its design has been shaped in the self-interest of those in positions of privilege and prestige, to monopolise advantages and secure labour and services from those below. This all-pervading system is the basic central and crucial phenomenon underlying the Indian social, educational and economic situation. The main function and effect of the ICS through the centuries to this day has been to lock up castes which provide agricultural labour and other labour and various services in such labour and services, with no/little scope for escape or upward mobility and deprive/minimise opportunities for their economic, educational and social advancement and retain monopoly/mere monopoly of advantageous positions and opportunities in the hands of the privileged castes/classes.

IV. ICS victims – Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the socially and educationally Backward Classes (BCs)

The worst victims of this system are the SCs, who have emerged in Indian society and economy as agricultural labour castes (ALCs) and castes which provide other forms of labour and 'menial' services such as 'manual scavenging', which no one will opt to provide except under compulsion. 'Untouchability' is a special instrument of ICS to keep SCs isolated from the society around them, demoralised and totally deprived of educational and other opportunities.

Comparable to SCs in the degree of deprivation are STs who are consigned to remote areas. Also deprived, though not subjected to "untouchability", are the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEdBCs), also known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and

Backward Classes (BCs) (hereafter BCs), consisting of castes of artisans and artisanal workers (blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, stone-cutters etc), service-providers (hair-cutters etc.), non-agricultural primary producers (e.g. fisher-folk) and providers of agricultural primary products (peasants) – though some of the castes of peasants who had the benefit of irrigation and access to market, modern technology etc have been able to climb out of social backwardness.

The above three categories of people – SCs, STs and BCs – constitute the overwhelming majority (about 75%) of India's population and contribute almost the entire physical labour force. Most of the Muslim and Christian minorities belong to specific BC communities, being converts from Hindu SCs and BCs.

V. Continuity of centuries – old ICS through colonial period to this day – inevitably resulting in emergence of reservation and other social justice measures

The two centuries of British colonial rule and the decades after Independence have introduced changes, but have not fundamentally altered India's socio-economic frame.

The continuity of the caste-traditional occupation-social status nexus to this day is illustrated by the following observation of the Supreme Court in its Mandal case judgment of 16-11-1992: "…a caste is nothing but… an occupational grouping… Even if one ceases to follow that occupation, still he remains and continues as member of that group…. Its social status and standing depends upon the nature of the occupation followed by it. Lowlier the occupation, lowlier the social standing… Lowly occupation results not only in low social position but also in poverty; It generates poverty. … this is the stark reality notwithstanding all our protestations and abhorrence and all attempts at weeding out this phenomenon."

The functioning of the ICS meant denial, to 'lower' castes – SCs, STs and BCs – of opportunities of education and advancement. Symbolic of this, in the pre-historic period, is the Ekalavya legend and, in modern period, the boycott of a Government school by 'upper' caste parents in 1853 when the first boy of an 'Untouchable' (Mahar) caste was admitted to school in Dharwar in Bombay Presidency (now in Karnataka).

The British introduced the concept of Equality before law, but did little to open up education for the downtrodden. I have elsewhere[1] described how the early British educationists desisted from actively encouraging education of 'despised castes' (whom they found to be the best pupils, capable of rising to high offices in colonial administration) out of fear of 'upper' caste backlash. I have also referred[2] to the Indian Education (Hunter) Commission (1882) giving instances of violence against and physical obstruction and waylaying of children of 'untouchables' on their way to schools in various provinces of India. Modern education and consequently jobs thus remained, as in the past centuries, a near-monopoly of a few castes accounting for 3 to 20% of the population of different regions, using caste solidarity as the instrument for appropriation and caste-cum 'Untouchability' as the instrument for exclusion of others.

It was in these circumstances that people of all castes/communities that had no/little share in governance/administration and no/limited access to education, especially English school education, began to demand reservation, and reservation became part of policy even before Independence. Since caste was the instrument of deprivation/ exclusion, it automatically became the instrument of mobilisation and reserved access.

VI. Constitution of India and its egalitarian architecture

The Constitution of India 1950 was born of the spirit of egalitarianism and of the goal of laying a sound base for enduring national integration. It contained far-reaching provisions for SC, ST and BC. Reservation was only one part of the

comprehensive measures envisaged by the Constitution to undo the continuing effect of the centuries-old injustice done to SCs, STs and BCs, to make educational and economic opportunities fully available to them, so that they are enabled to reach the level of the Socially Advanced Castes (SACs) or the Non-SC, non-ST, Non-BC castes (NSCTBCs) in all parameters including education at all levels.

VII. Social justice schemes for progress and equality of SCs, STs and BCs – their effect and limitations

Important schemes to secure educational progress and equality of SCs, STs, and much later BCs, were introduced at different points of time at the national level beginning, for example, with Post-Matric Scholarship scheme for SCs instituted by Dr. Ambekdar in 1943 as Viceroy's Executive Council Member. While these have helped to bring about some progress, their full effect has not become available because of failure to undertake radical economic measures like endowing all rural SC and other landless agricultural families a viable extent of agricultural land; provision of irrigation for all agricultural lands of SCs and STs (both solemn undertakings of rulings parties and governments merrily and thoughtlessly forgotten); and quantitatively and qualitatively universalising and strengthening school and pre-school education for SC, ST and BC children.

VIII. Present scenario of continued gross educational inequality of SCs, STs and BCs compared to SACs/NSCTBCs

Consequently, we still find the continued existence of gross educational inequality at every level of education between the SCs and STs, at one end, and the SACs/NSCTBCs, at the other end, with the BCs in between, usually closer to SCs and STs than to SACs/NSCTBCs. The following NSSO data for age group 15 & above bring this out:

India (66th Round 2009-10)				
	SC	ST	BC	SAC/NSCTBC
Not Literate	41.5	44.6	33.2	20.1
Secondary Level	9.8	9.2	13.2	16.6
Graduate & above	3.4	9.2	5.4	13.6
Delhi Females (61st Round 2004-05) (reflects metropolitan-Indian situation as Delhi is essentially metropolitan)				
Graduate & above	1.3	3.4	No ST list for Delhi	26.2

IX. Paramount need to buttress demographic dividend with equality dividend for India's optimal economic growth and all-round human resources development

Unless measures to eliminate this inequality are undertaken, we can neither fulfil the constitutional goal of equality, nor can we secure the demographic dividend, indispensable for India's optimal economic growth. In other words, we must bring in the concept of 'Equality Dividend', which can be achieved to benefit the nation by enabling the SCs, STs and BCs to become equals to the SACs in all levels of education and in all other economic and social parameters.

X. Measures required for SCs, STs and BCs to secure equality

The various measures required to fulfil the Right of SCs and STs to Educational Equality and Parity at all levels and in all fields of education with SACs/NSCTBCs (as also those required for their economic advancement, equalisation of health standards, humanisation of living and working conditions) have been well-mapped out in various documents[3, 4, 5, 6, 7]. I have prepared or in the preparation of which I have been closely associated with and which are lying with the Government along with proposals and recommendations made earlier

in Government files all these years with no attention/no serious attention and action.

The most important of them are briefly listed below:

(1) An Anganwadi Centre (AWC) in every SC and ST habitation and isolated/distinct BC habitations (e.g. fishermen's hamlets), with a qualififed teacher for every AWC, trained in Montessori and other such methods.

(2) An open-ended pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme for SC Children from Class I to X as done for ST children from 1.7.2012.

(3) For Class VI to XII, High Quality Residential Schools, one each for SC girls and SC boys, and for ST girls and ST boys, in every Block – 75% of seats should be for SC students in SC residential schools and 75% of seats for ST children in ST residential schools, and the remaining 25% for children of other groups including children of poor families of SACs/NSCTBCs. This 75%-25% formula will optimally serve the purpose of focus on the educationally deprived as well as social integration. The number of residential schools should be such as to cover all SC and ST children at this stage of education. Merely providing population-equivalent proportion of reservation for SC and ST children in schools for all like Navodaya and Central schools will not be able to remove the backlog of inequality inherited over the centuries.

Similar measures also required for BCs including BC Muslims and Christians.

A successful model exists since about 3½ decades in Andhra Pradesh. There are 288 residential schools for SCs and a similar number for ST children in the State and about 50 for BC children. Their results at Class XII are considerably higher than the State average. A provision of Rs 250 crores made, on my advice, for a national-level scheme of this type of residential schools for SC, ST and BC girls in 1996 and subsequently augmented to Rs 400 crores, was not utilised for this purpose.

(4) Reservation for SCs, STs and BCs in Professional, Technological and other Higher Educational institutions in the burgeoning private sector, along with other related supporting measures and facilities, in fulfilment of the Constitution (Ninety-Third Amendment) Act, 2005.

(5) Removal of road-blocks in SC and ST Post-Matric and Overseas Scholarship Schemes (both of Ambedkar vintage of 1943) such as family income-ceiling and that too at self-defeatingly low level; and expansion of the latter scheme.

(6) Similar removal of the ridiculously low family-income ceiling of Rs. 40,000 for rural areas and Rs. 55,000 for urban areas for eligibility for educational loans from National SC and ST Finance and Development Corporations for SC and ST students for professional and technical courses.

I can make available to those interested fuller details of the above schemes and particulars of a number of other schemes which require removal of road-blocks and expansion in order to remove the gap between SCs, STs and BCs, on one side, and the SACs/NSCTBCs, on the other, at all levels of education.

XI. **Banishing 'untouchability' and prejudices against social justice measures from schools and other educational institutions**

The continuing cancer of 'untouchability' against SCs and prejudices against Social Justice measures are a serious drag on the human, national and Constitutional mission of real actualisation of Equality in education. The prevalence of 'untouchability' in schools has been brought out in a Report of the Human Rights Watch (HRW) titled, "They Say We're Dirty: Denying an Education to India's Marginalised" released on 22.4.2014, based on its study of four States, including Delhi, right under Central Government's nose. These findings are true of most parts of the country.

The following measures need to be taken to root out 'untouchablity' and prejudices against social justice:-

(1) Pro-active steps to ensure that SC and ST children are intermixed with other children in class-room seating and mid-day meal seating.

In the mid-day meal scheme either the cook or the server should be an SC woman as an effective measure against 'untouchability'. Resistance should be firmly repelled.

(2) Human rights education with emphasis on anti-human, anti-national and anti-Constitutional nature of the ICS, caste-based loyalties, biases and antagonisms, and particularly of 'untouchability'-based discriminations, and on Equality as enshrined in the Constitution should be introduced in every educational institution, at all levels, and every teacher-training institution. The experience of Institute of Human Rights Education should be utilized and the efforts of such institutions strengthened by active government participation in financial and other terms.

(3) There should be a comprehensive campaign to sensitise the entire community of teachers so that they become a bulwark against 'untouchability'- based discriminations in all its forms in educational institutions.

(4) Human rights education should also convey the historical circumstances continuing to this day which make reservation and other Social Justice measures inevitable and indispensable. The Constitutional architecture pertaining to Equality and the advancement of SCs, STs and BCs including BCs of religious minorities with particular attention to their women and specially vulnerable groups among them and its essentiality for national progress should be clearly brought out, and the national and patriotic duty of all to co-operate in these tasks should be driven home.

These educational measures have to be supported by counterpart economic, occupational, health-and-nutrition-related and living-conditions-related measures in order to secure full results. I can make details of these supportive available to those interested.

What can voluntary organisations and trusts do to meaningfully contribute to this task

The task is of such magnitude that it can be undertaken in its full dimension only by the Central and State governments and institutions. But voluntary organisations and trusts can contribute in a tangible manner. For example, each of them can take up all the villages and towns in one or more State/one or more districts/one or more Blocks, or one or more villages/towns, and in the selected spatial area establish Anganwadis and/or residential schools of the type mentioned at (X) (1) and (3) above. Those who have established private educational institutions out of genuine educational and social motivation can also contribute meaningfully to this task in this manner. Such voluntary initiatives, if taken seriously and sincerely, can establish models as Andhra Pradesh government has done.

But first, voluntary organisations, trusts and private educationists will have to adopt the policy of greater focus and more support to those who have been rendered unequal by the ICS over the centuries to this day so that they can become in fact equal to the SACs/NSCTBCs in education. Adopting a pious-sounding approach of not distinguishing among the different unequal social classes and serving all 'equally', will result in perpetuating the inequality created by the ICS. For, as even President Lyndon Johnson has said after the US enacted the Civil Rights Act in 1964, "it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates." The measures I have listed here and certain other measures are required precisely to create in the historically and currently deprived and disadvantaged classes of citizens of India this very ability to walk through the gates of opportunity and secure their due share.

From my knowledge and experience of 65 years covering the whole country in the field of social justice with focus on SCs, STs, BCs including BCs of religious minorities, I can provide inputs and guidance required by any sincere voluntary organisation/trust/private educationist who wants to join this human, national, patriotic and constitutional enterprise.

1. P. S. Krishnan (2009), "Empowering Dalits for Empowering India: A Road-Map", New Delhi: Manak Publications.
2. P. S. Krishnan (2006), "Logical Step – The socio-historical and Constitutional Perspective and Imperatives of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Bill, 2006", Frontline, 23 (8), May 5, 2006.
3. The Dalit Manifesto (1996), formulated by P.S. Krishnan on behalf of the National Action Forum for Social Justice, reprinted in P.S.Krishnan (2009), op.cit.
4. Report of Sub-Group-I (Chairman: P.S. Krishnan) on Perspective Planning for Empowerment of Scheduled Castes in the XII Plan, set up by the Planning Commission and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
5. Reports of Task Forces for the Educational Development of SCs and STs (2012), Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India.
6. Recommendations of the Group of Ministers on Dalit Affairs set up in 2005 under Shri Pranab Mukherjee's Chairmanship (2008)
7. Report of National (Venkatachaliah) Commission for Review of the Working of the Constitution (2002).

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Who Decides Where I Belong?

Ritika Chawla

"The bell rang. I took out my tiffin box from my bag and left the classroom. I climbed down the stairs and went to sit at my usual place in the shed area. Looking through the iron grill rods, I saw a group of girls from my class sitting in a circle under the tree. Some other kids played in the ground. I finished my lunch and went and sat next to the bai. Bai is my only friend in school. She works in the office and calls me 'Shaktimaan' to tease me, but I like it. Each day at school seems the same, each lunch break… I walk around looking for familiar faces each afternoon." – Sneha*

"The school Annual Day is coming up. I'm very excited. This is the only time of the year I feel wanted. I love dancing and I'm good at it and all the groups planning a dance performance want me in it. This is different from other days in class. Every time a teacher gives us work to do in a group, no one takes me till the teacher tells them to. Even if the groups are divided by the teacher, I am given the easiest thing to do like collecting pictures. I know I have problems in writing and remembering things but it is not that I do it on purpose. Why can't I be part of groups in class too and not just for dancing?" – Sonal*

These two stories of Sneha and Sonal are true. They both are classmates in grade 8 of an inclusive school. When I say 'inclusive', I mean that this is a school where children from all types of socio-economic backgrounds and learning difficulties along with neurotypical children study in the same classroom. Children with learning difficulties or disabilities are provided extra support by the school and teachers by way of remedial classes, parallel classes in Math and English, different curriculum, different assessments, etc. All the teachers and the staff know the children with special needs irrespective of whether they are teaching them or not. The parents are kept in loop for every decision taken and a strong communication bond is built involving parents, teachers, principal and at times the school counsellor. Yet, there is something that neither the school nor the parents can control or change for children such as Sneha and Sonal. It is the 'other' students in the school.

Sneha has Down's Syndrome and due to that her disability is 'visible' to others. It's not like children in her class never approached her. In the beginning when a new student joined her class, she tried talking to Sneha but kept away once she felt that Sneha was an extremely sensitive child. Though in general her classmates never bothered her or teased her, Sneha does lack friends in a way. Her life, unlike other children's, is not about 'girls stay-overs' or teenage birthday parties to which she rarely gets invited. She is asked out only when the whole class is being invited but not when it is a few special friends a child is inviting.

Sonal on the other hand did not really lack friends as such. She's a wonderful dancer and liked participating in all extra-curricular activities. Hence, she realized that she was 'not intelligent enough' only when it came to academic work. Yet, these subtle forms of discrimination hurt her and she does not share her feelings with her parents or teachers as she feels they might worry too much. She is also part of the parallel class with fewer children and even though this has helped her build a special bond with her English teacher she stills vies to be in the regular class.

**Name changed to protect identity.*

For children like Sonal, being part of inclusive settings is tough and for children like Sneha it becomes even worse because their disability is clearly visible. Being treated as equal by the school teachers and staff or with more sensitively such as being part of the school annual day does not cover up for what these children go through on a daily basis. In situations where these children were teased or made fun of, their teachers intervened and reprimanded other students. There were times teachers held circle time to make students understand the diversity in class and be sensitive to others' needs; they even had one-on-one conversations with both the child with special needs and his/her peers. But beyond a point even their peers are children and 'lecturing' them can work negatively. Hence, to what extent could teachers really interfere in such matters? How much could they really control or change for these students? Could they really influence student behavior to such an extent? In the long run maybe yes, but not immediately.

Most students have a friend or group of friends based on things that commonly interest them or to fulfill their basic need for sharing and expressing thoughts and feelings. But at some level, children with special needs seem to be lacking this. As mentioned earlier the school provides additional support to children with special through parallel classes. Even children who are struggling with Math and English due to other reasons such as low scores are part of these classes. Though most children said that parallel classes are helpful but those who have never been part of these classes prefer not to be sent there.

On being asked about the experience of the students once they leave the inclusive school setting, the principal of this particular school mentioned that children who were 'normal' came back and thanked the school, feeling gratitude for having being exposed to an inclusive setting. For example, when they experienced diversity in their universities or work places they were more sensitive towards others; but none of the students with special needs came back to talk about their experiences and share if they too had a good time during their schooling. Were they really happy in school just as all other students? I'm sure each child in school has a different experience from all others but there are some things that we all cherish all our lives and most important of those are the friendships we form at school that at times last a lifetime.

Being in the education space for last four years, I have come to realize that there is a lot that needs to be changed and a lot more that can be changed. There are many dilemmas that I can think of pertaining to inclusive settings, such as if I were a peer or even the teacher of these students I would struggle to understand whether to be empathetic or treat them as any other "normal" students. Would these students do better in special schools or sending them there is a form of exclusion worse than having them treated differently within inclusive settings?

I understand that inclusion is probably the way to be if we want to reach out to every child in this country, and it can be implemented better if we train teachers appropriately, have special educators in all schools, involve parents and community to shift mindsets, change assessment formats and improve curriculum and pedagogy. The question that is difficult to answer is: is there a way to make sure that all children have a great schooling experience despite their special needs? Is there a way to curb exclusion completely? This is a complex issue and as mentioned earlier requires teachers, parents, counsellors and special educators to come together to find a solution. And for that matter the solution might lie in smaller steps such as the teacher dividing the task herself instead of leaving it to the students or making children understand the value of the process of working collaboratively rather than being merely grade-oriented. Encouraging peers to accept children with special needs as they are, rather than feeling pity or keeping away from them. I know that children with disabilities know about their limitations but the least we can do is not to make them realize these constantly but accept them for the being they are with due respect. To bring about such a mindset change in the society we need to build awareness and propagate inclusion among our communities.

One thing is apparent - we have a long way to go before we bring about this attitudinal and behavioral change among our students. Inclusion is a far-fetched dream for the Indian education system, and we stand at the brink of the change. This change has to be first in the perspectives of teachers, schools and other institutes, parents, peers and the community at large. Also, this change has to be top-down and bottom-up; with policy changes at the top and practice-based changes at the bottom. Till we involve parents, teachers and other stakeholders at every step including the children with special needs themselves and their peers, bringing about inclusion will continue to remain a huge challenge.

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SECTION B

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Barriers to Inclusion in Education

Annie John

A month into school and Mrs. G., the UKG class teacher, was worried, "S doesn't understand anything I say, and I don't know how to teach her. She copies from other students around her. During play time, she stands and watches the others without joining in." The student in question, had been admitted into the school under the RtE Act, did not understand English, (the medium of instruction of most private schools - in this article I have used the words 'private schools' to refer to schools where the RtE Act is enforced) and her teacher was at a loss how to address the situation! This and similar concerns, frustrate those in the school system when trying to cope with the situation that they are faced with, since the RtE Act was enforced in 2008. Teachers, who want to succeed, depend on their own creativity and intuitive sense to work with a group of children who, in spite of wearing the same uniform, appear different. Are they different? What is the difference? Do we try to make them 'fit in', or allow them to be different?

To grow and learn, a child requires an environment where her social and emotional needs are met. To create such a supportive environment it is imperative that each member of the community that is involved in the process of inclusion is considered of equal influence. There are no givers or takers in this equation, this is not a charitable act, rather one that benefits all involved. The very mission statement of inclusion is missed when one participant/stakeholder is considered better/ greater than the others.

The school setting is a critical environment for the child who is considered for inclusion, and the persons who influence and affect the inclusion process the most are - the child, the parents (the child's parents and parents of the other students), the school administration, the school support staff and teachers. It is this community that needs to understand and concur with the philosophy of inclusion and the reasons for its implementation, in order for inclusion to take place as smoothly and effectively as possible.

UNESCO (2008) has listed barriers to inclusion as attitudinal factors, physical barriers, curriculum, teacher attitudes and abilities, language and communication, socio-economic factors, funding, organization of the educational system and policies. While each of the above is of importance, I will restrict myself, in this article to attitudinal factors – that of the school's as well as of the parents', language and communication, and socio- economic factors. How do they present as barriers, in the context of implementation of the RTE Act in India?

Teacher attitudes towards the process of inclusion and the child who is the target of inclusion, impact on the success of inclusive education. Teacher resistance could present as a result of different reasons. For one, mainstream teachers feel that they don't have the skills to teach students who present with academic challenges as the lesson is not designed for differentiated teaching. This is further complicated by their sense of guilt that giving individual attention to one child, or a small group of children, will take away teaching time from other students. Another likely reason for teacher resistance to inclusion is their incorrect understanding of inclusion and their 'philosophy' towards inclusion; some teachers view inclusion as 'getting the child to be like everyone else', while others might see inclusion as offering an environment where different needs be met.

When the teaching and the instructional material is in English, as is the case in most private schools in

India, a child with no previous knowledge of English will have difficulty in following the lesson and accessing the curriculum. Often, for these children, their only exposure to English will be the teachers and their peers at school. The child is not immersed in the language the way her middle class peers are – by way of story books, hearing others (parents, friends) converse in English, watching television or films in English, or even to see English print as in a newspaper, and this deprives the child of a range of vocabulary. If appropriate accommodations are not provided for the child, there will be an increasing gap between the teaching and the learning that takes place. As a result the child will be expected to 'catch up' (through extra lessons or tuitions), leaving the teacher feeling inadequate and frustrated and the child a disconnect with the main person in her 7 hour school day.

In addition, in my experience, children who are not proficient in the language of instruction and do not participate in class are discriminated against, by their peers, as well. Young children play out stories that they have read or watched on television and anyone amongst them who does not understand the setting of the 'language' or the story, is alienated. A 10 year old (from a socially and economically disadvantaged background) with behavior problems, whom I was working with, was in an inclusive programme with middle class children. She found it hard to make friends and when asked what the main difference was, said 'English – they talk differently'.

While it is clear that children who do not have a prior knowledge of the English language will require support in learning the language, the question that is most difficult to answer is – when do we give these children the extra support they need. It would be convenient for the education system to use the so called 'non-academic lessons' (like sport or art), or during their lunch break for support classes. However, as the social integration of children with their peers occurs most often during non-academic settings and, as it is perhaps during such times that these children find the playing field a little more equal, should we, knowing the ramifications, take this time (and interaction) away from them?

The kind of pencil box, the child's hairstyle, the kind of shoes they wear, the kind of food that is brought from home as snack or lunch are all indicators of a child's cultural and socio-economic background and become reasons for discrimination in a classroom of children. Children observe these differences and unless these are accepted and understood as 'normal differences', they become material for discrimination and bullying.

The familiarity (or not), with the usage of the different facilities provided in a school, are barriers that are not easily identifiable. A young child who does not use a commode in the toilet at home will not be familiar with its use in school, resulting in spills or stains that become evident to his or her peers. This can result in bullying in the form of name calling, being ridiculed or being labeled by peers, and subsequent social isolation; in addition to condescending attitudes or expressions of distaste among adults. Isolation of children among peers leads to social difficulties and affects their self-esteem as well. Identifying such obstacles to inclusion becomes the responsibility of sensitive school personnel.

The class and caste bias in Indian society against groups that are less advantaged (by birth or socio-economic status), lead to attitudes that discriminate and label. It is widely assumed by parents of middle class children that children from underprivileged homes are different: will help themselves to things that do not belong to them, that they are not exposed to instruction in their homes about basic values of right and wrong, that they carry disease and do not understand the basics of hygiene. Parents (thankfully, not all) who send their children to private schools, react with anticipated dismay at the thought of their (clean, healthy and 'ethically perfect' and 'well mannered'– no lies, no stealing, no foul language, no aggression) children interacting for 7 hours every day with those who do not have these advantages. This translates to instilling in their own child an attitudinal bias against children who come in through the RtE Act. This kind of bias also exists among our teachers who are, after all, part of the same culture.

Open and ongoing communication must be accessible to all who are involved in inclusion. Heads of schools who are not sensitive to parents who are not fully literate or to those parents who do not read or write in English, will not provide accommodations or give these parents the confidence that they are part of the inclusion process. Parents who are not familiar with English are made to feel different when kept out of whole school programmes (like an Annual Day), which further add to their and their child's feeling of alienation. One teacher had the idea to designate a parent (not part of the RtE admissions), fluent in the local language, to ensure that all communications were shared with those not fluent in English. Simple measures like this could help bridge the gap.

Some parents of children who enter schools through the RtE Act have expressed their apprehension of whether their child would be made to feel different. Parents need to know and understand the accommodations that are provided for their child; when and how their child's needs are addressed; in addition they need to understand the importance of their contribution to their child's education – not only in providing the child with a physical space to study and do their homework, but also with their active participation in the school processes and activities. They are often just grateful that their child is getting an education that would otherwise not have been possible. This sense of gratitude along with a reluctance to assert, as parents, in the education of their child does not empower them to be equal partners in this process. Parents have a right to be involved socially, intellectually, culturally and personally in the system.

Real inclusion is what we want to aim for, but will we be able to overcome the hurdles and barriers that come in the way to achieve this? Will we be able to change attitudinal biases, be sensitive to differences of every kind, and celebrate them instead of judging them? Will we be able to facilitate the process of inclusion and get these vulnerable children through a basic school education without damaging their sense of self?

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Girls' Education – Causes for Dropout of Adolescents

Cynthia Stephen

Many states in India have made impressive strides to ensure that children, especially girls, go to school and stay there for as long as possible. In Karnataka, thousands of socially vulnerable girls study at the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) residential schools in over 70 taluks, completing 8th standard and then moving to regular schools or to the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) residential schools under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, one of the largest social sector initiatives. But is this sufficient? Why do girls continue to drop out of school?

Recent research shows that in Karnataka over 30% of girls are married before the age of 18, despite efforts by both Government and civil society to promote higher age at marriage, build awareness on the huge disadvantages of child marriage to the individual, family and society, empower child protection systems by appointing, training and equipping child protection officers and local government bodies with laws and powers to prevent child marriage.

A recent real-life case study, in Bangalore city may help us understand the forces playing on the girl child, her education, schooling, adolescence and early adulthood; issues of gender, sexuality, security and social mores, of reproductive roles and domestic labour vis-à-vis the attitudes of the government and legal system.

Case study

Three years ago, Geetha, 13, was promoted to the 8th Standard. She had to change schools, going to one about half a kilometer from her house in a slum. She was slim and exceptionally tall for her age. She caught the eye of a boy, Raju then 19, next door. Raju, now 21, went to school for one year when he was 6, but ran away when the teacher used corporal punishment to insist on doing his homework. He played with other children near his house for a few years and when he was about 12, joined other men from his locality at work on a construction site nearby. So when Geetha started for school with her bag and lunch basket, Raju followed her and tried to make conversation. Though frightened that her parents would spot this, she secretly enjoyed being sought after daily by this nice-looking young fellow, who seemed very jealous when she spoke to her classmates who walked with her. Soon this was noticed and elders spoke to the boy's parents - "Seems your boy likes Geetha. We see them talking near the school." News soon reached the girl's parents, sparking off predictable scenes. Geetha was soundly beaten. Neighbours ran in to mediate. Geetha's mother began to accompany her to school, but not for long – she was a domestic worker and had to go to work early every morning. Some elderly ladies advised, "Why send her to school, get her married to this boy. She looks quite grown up for her age, and the boy seems really fond of her." The mother had different plans. She herself had been married at 13 and had never been to school, so she wanted her daughter to be a teacher. But with an alcoholic husband who demanded money for drink in addition to her having to support the family, she had little option but to go to work regularly. Geetha's younger brother studied well and was regular to school. His mother also paid for his education in an aided school.

Emboldened by the exposure, Raju began to walk with Geetha daily to and from school. When term holidays arrived, they could not meet daily. He suggested that they elope. Geetha, by now completely under his thumb, agreed and began

secreting clothes in a bag. Her mother discovered the bag. All hell broke loose. Both were beaten black and blue by her father. Local opinion suggested that since the "girl's name was spoilt", and anyway the affair was common knowledge, why not get the young people married? After all, this would be better than the disgrace of their running away. So Geetha was soon married to Raju in a simple ceremony. She was about 13 and a half. In a few weeks, she became pregnant and in due course, to the delight of the whole family, a healthy baby was born after a high-risk delivery in a big government hospital.

Raju got work intermittently as a construction labourer. As the child grew, the stress of motherhood caused Geetha to become irritable and cry easily. She could not do any domestic work at home, and tired of nursing and caring for the child. While her mother did her best, she was not able to keep the situation from escalating. Tensions grew. At the child's first birthday, the mother was not yet 16. The relationship began to deteriorate, and Raju began to beat her up. In a present-day twist, the girl retaliated in kind.

The girl's mother told me, "I am not talking to my daughter, she needs to be punished for her rudeness to her husband. She calls him names and even beats him back when he beats her!" I tried to explain that in the present day adolescents have so many contrasting role models and Geetha was finding the situation too much to handle. I encouraged the mother to consider negotiating with the in-laws to permit her to join the KGBV or at least to allow her to join the Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK), which have informal residential facilities, including schooling, being run by the Mahila Samakhya Karnataka for women and girls at risk. The mother, looked shocked, saying "But she is now married. How can she go away to school?" and dismissed the idea. Months passed. Raju continued to be jealously possessive and insisted that Geetha stay at home even when they had nothing to eat as he had not gone to work for days. After another huge quarrel, in which the police was involved but refused to file the case, the family agreed that Geetha would be provided money daily to keep the home fires burning. Needless to say, the arrangement soon broke down with the boy's family alleging that she was a spendthrift.

Finally Geetha took on domestic work, taking the toddler with her, but often her mother had to go and get the child who was a 'hindrance' as he wanted his mother's attention while she was working. Things went on in this way till one day the mother called. "Akka, please can you send Geetha away to the school you told me about?" she asked abruptly. "She does not want to go back, and he too says he does not want her. So I want to send her far away and let her resume her studies."

Soon they turned up, and Geetha was sent to study in one of Mahila Samakhya's institutions in a nearby town, infant son cared for by his 32-yr old grandmother. Geetha declares she is fed up of Raju's physical and verbal abuse, jealousy and psychological violence. He, however, is looking for her, and demanding to be reunited. The situation may turn volatile if he decides to aggressively pursue her, especially as the child is still in the vicinity.

What issues militated against Geetha's uninterrupted schooling?

Clearly, many cultural factors had a role to play. First, the location of the school. The lack of a high school nearer home, causing her to walk to school gave ample opportunity for her to be 'stalked' on the way. This is a key reason for families to stop their daughters from school after puberty.

The second factor is the socialization which prepares girls for marriage, not for careers or higher education, from infancy. Social pressure on parents to get the girl married, premium on the virginity of the girl at the time of marriage and the lack of protection to the girl from sexual exploitation in her locality is another big driver of girl-child dropout and early marriage. Girls from poor, SC/ST or minority families, are at higher risk because perpetrators do not fear action from the police which does not take action on complaints filed by these sections. So the families keep their girls at home and groom them for domesticity to the exclusion of any other options.

Young men feel it is their prerogative to aggressively pursue any girl they take a fancy to especially from the poorer sections and families tacitly support this behavior through weak controls over his behaviour, and use this to encourage marriage even if the parties are underage. This is reinforced by popular films in Kannada and Telugu, which depict their 'heroes' as young/adolescent males who forcefully 'woo' girls on the way to school/college, often successfully using coercion and blackmail to gain their attention. Often, these males are also depicted as either academic underachievers or as being from the working class, bringing the stories close to the lived experiences of the young male target audience, whose fantasies of wooing and winning a girl above one's station – even if it is in the form of higher educational attainment - become a real-life experience given the societal norms and practices.

In this case even the 'man' was barely 20 at marriage. Despite the law prohibiting child marriage, and campaigns against it on the TV, in schools and by NGOs, the practice continues almost unabated especially in rural North Karnataka, where there is strong social sanction and support. The government cannot be absolved of responsibility due to weak information dissemination against the practice and its poor implementation of the law due to lack of political will. It is hardly known that early marriage is outlawed and perpetrators liable for punishment. Officials often do not take action for fear of community backlash, or because even they do not believe in preventing child marriage.

Thus poverty, gender discrimination, unimplemented legal frameworks, community norms including those for (gendered) masculine behaviour, insecure incomes and, most of all, the wide-spread attitude that the domestic sphere is the inevitable and inescapable destiny for girls/women drives the practice, even as the progress made to change this attitude is slow.

Even if the family's scarce resources are used for the child's education, there is no guarantee that suitable employment will result in decent and appropriate employment to the socially vulnerable. Even bachelor's degree-holders among the poor are found as casual manual labour in construction and transport sectors (men) and in the service sector (women). A key reason is the negative attitude of employers towards hiring young people from disadvantaged backgrounds for white-collar jobs, while bribery and corruption make it impossible for them to access government jobs. Hence families in general hesitate to invest in education especially higher education and especially for girls.

Given the proven global reality that educating girls has a huge socio-economic dividend at a societal level in terms of delaying under-age pregnancy with its health and survival challenges to both mother and child, giving critical personal knowledge and understanding on survival skills, literacy and citizenship rights and responsibilities, the opportunity for emotional and psychological maturity and, most important, the knowledge and skills necessary to negotiate the changing social and economic scenario through educated and involved participation, what more can institutions and families do to change the reality? Governments and families spending on the education of the young and especially of girl children are investing in the future. Why then are these attainments so hard to achieve? 'The persistent patriarchal norms and increased influence of misogyny in Indian society, combined with neoliberal economic policies, causing an all-pervasive media influence, the breakdown of traditional behavioural trends, and withdrawal of state from the social sector are all part of the problem. A re-look at the educational policies which limit compulsory education to age 14, stronger implementation of girl-child friendly protective legislation to prevent child marriage, and greater public consciousness of gender-sensitive family norms would be the way forward.'

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Social Inclusion and Exclusion – My Experiences

Deepika K Singh

I am sharing about my experiences of being a student in a school that largely catered to a middle class neighbourhood with most of the students' father or mother employed in the same industry but in different capacities, spanning from a floor cleaner to director of a department.

I remember, I was in grade 8 and it was Mathematics class, our teacher was teaching us. The office boy came and gave a sheet of paper to the teacher. The teacher said, "I will call out names of children, you have to collect your scholarship." She read out few names and then one more name, this was name of a bright girl student. She always got in first three ranks and was liked by the teacher. The teacher even commented on her dressing and if she wore a T-shirt the teacher would tell her "good girls" should not be wearing such clothes. She read out the girl's name from the list, the girl jumped from the bench but the teacher said "Oh! You are a schedule caste, chi chi".

I remember the "chi chi". This was my introduction to the caste system and I understood that something was not good about being Schedule Caste so the teacher made that remark. But then there was something about it because of which the students got scholarship. It must have been a painful experience for my friend who was humiliated by the teacher.

The other experience I remember is that when one of my friends had a quarrel with another classmate, he called him 'ABC'. I asked him what ABC was and he explained to me that it meant 'Aye, BC means you backward caste." We were in grade 8 or 9 then.

The above experiences point towards issues of discrimination and more so stigmatisation of a particular group of students in school as well as the role of school in normalising and further strengthening certain stereotypes as well as 'image' in this case image of a 'good girl'. The incidents also point out discriminatory interactions that happen on day to day basis in a school between students and teachers and between students and students. Though a middle class girl is able to access education and continue in school she has to face gender stereotypes as well as caste discrimination.

However, I also have memories of how a few teachers and a new principal tried to break the 'boundaries' that were created amongst students and the labels that were tagged on to different students. While I was in secondary school our class had two distinct groups - a group of students who looked physically stronger and did well in sports and another group who did not look physically very strong, but did well in studies. These were two distinct groups, there were many other kinds of groups that were formed but in this section I will share narratives about these two groups.

The boundaries were created because of achievements and teachers' preferences. While the physical education teacher preferred the physically stronger students to lead the teams and most of them also got many prizes for the school, the other group of students resented this as they were not made team leaders. But when it came to language, mathematics and science the teachers provided opportunities in classroom discussions to those who scored well in exams, were articulate in their thoughts, had certain fluency in English and who sometime also had answers to questions which were not necessarily from the textbooks that we all read. I remember our oral examination in grade 9 and the teacher asked me, "Why is the colour of milk white?" and I said, "Because of its protein content". The teacher laughed very loudly and I realised that

the answer was incorrect but she did not share the 'correct' answer with us. Definitely, it being a 'scientific knowledge', could have only one correct answer and there was no space for the teacher to even probe for any 'common sensical' understanding that a student wanted to apply, nor was the teacher interested in knowing the reason for such an answer. The teacher at the end of the exam praised one boy who always got first rank for his knowledge about science and how he was the only one who knew how a particular laboratory instrument was to be used, and many of us wondered that the teacher never made us use that instrument and expected us to know how the instrument was used in a particular way. I link the experience to the entire mechanism through which schools and evaluation system are geared to filter out students. That is what the teacher did by setting the questions in a particular manner ensuring that only a few could answer, knowing well that the school had just managed to get laboratory equipment and was setting up a library for secondary school and hence any understanding beyond textbooks could be only created if the parents had that knowledge and could engage with the child or if the child had access to reference material at home or extra support in form of tutorials.

This drives us towards the point of working class children and children from 'elite' groups and the way in which schools favour the 'elite groups'. There are other instances where an English teacher chose a student from the physically strong group and the other from academic group. She first asked the 'stronger' one, as the student answered the question she laughed and said "See this is what he knows". The teacher knew that this student would not be able to answer. As the teacher ridiculed this student some of us thought what the right answer could be and someone prompted to the other student who then gave the correct answer. In this case actually both the students did not know the answer but one has the opportunity to correct and take support from peers and had peers who knew the answer but the other did not. This incident raises several issues, not only about labelling, but also ridiculing and thereby harming a student's self-esteem and self-confidence. The incidents also raise issues how students access resources 'capital' as the school favours a particular kind of knowledge and the way knowledge is used as an instrument to humiliate and create hierarchies and also how peers help each other. Incidents of this kind can definitely silence many students in classrooms for fear of humiliation. Hence, while the aim of education should be to give voice to those oppressed it actually makes them silent.

Some of our teachers did ensure participation of those who were labelled 'last benchers or unintelligent'. The teacher also ensured spending some time with them during class-work, checking their notebooks; these were classes when all of us participated. Our new Principal tried to break the existing labels; for the first time it was made mandatory for all to participate in all school events. He ensured that those who had never participated in a debate got support from teachers to prepare for it, he himself gave time for it and those who did not lead a team were made team captains, some of the groups did win. I remember that the perception that I had about some students did change, I don't know if the labelling that the teachers did got challenged (in their minds) or not.

The idea of cultural capital could also be invoked through these experiences since a particular class or students who had cultural advantage over others in terms of language, exposure, parental support, access to knowledge and mannerism that were appreciated in the school. The experience brings forth the role of teachers and principal in creating culture of inclusion.

In an another incident when our school Principal was teaching us commerce subject he asked, "What are shares". My father, since an early age, made me work with him not only to repair his scooter but also fill up application form of shares and I took the opportunity to read the tiny text on the application form. In response to the answer, I explained the entire process of how companies issue shares and applications are filled and money is given to the company and profit is shared later; one of my classmates, again from the 'brighter' lot, shouted that it was a wrong answer and he knew the correct

answer. The teacher (Principal) heard both the answers and said that one was from the textbook and the other was more practical. For the first time I felt that the work that I did with my father had some relevance with my school education. The incident, though is not one of physical labour, can be linked to the issue of connecting children's work with education, students' experiences and their labour with education. In this case both the answers were correct, the teacher accepted both the answers and explained the reason too, further the teacher did not rate one answer superior or inferior to the other.

The school had certain practices which could be termed 'being inclusive'; the school was a state board school but instead of 'saraswati vandana' to invoke goddess of knowledge, our school had different songs that we sang at the end of the day followed by national anthem. On every Saturday prayers of different religions such as Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity were said. We all folded hands and also opened our palms to do these prayers and tried to make a cross. I looked forward to this day and enjoyed reading these prayers from our school diary.

In the current scenario where issues about saffronization of curriculum are raised, government schools being public institutions have Saraswati idols and prayers though according to the Constitution of India schools should be secular and not promote any religion. This school where I studied in 90s either reflects the socio-political conditions of that time or is an aberration since being a private school it could have easily promoted 'majoritarian' culture but it decided to do otherwise.

Each one of us can recall experiences of exclusion and discrimination even if we may have studied in schools that catered to a particular class since discrimination and exclusion are based on identities of class, caste, religion, gender, rural- urban difference, or tribal-non tribal culture. In fact incidents that may seem to be a purely academic differentiation had deep linkages to the overall issue of the knowledge, pedagogy and evaluation that the curriculum and schools accept which are in favour of a particular group. But we also have experiences that are 'positive' where we experienced teachers warmth and concern, where we felt that each one had the opportunity to participate, each one was supported to avail of the opportunity, diversity was being not only tolerated but celebrated in myriad ways and hierarchies were challenged, voices were raised against discrimination.

The same school where I experienced being humiliated at times, discriminated at times, sometimes being included, sometimes proud and sometimes got a sense of achievement; prepared me to pursue doctoral studies from an institute like the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Did the school perform its role of reproducing the class, caste, gender hierarchies and religious difference or did it help me to challenge some of those hierarchies? Or should I consider myself one of those who belonged to the rising urban middle class section of society that benefited from expansion of education? It did filter those who joined industrial training and those who could continue higher education by ranking us and thus social hierarchies were converted to academic hierarchies (Velaskar, 2005).

We can raise many such questions and the intersection of family aspiration, school dynamics and larger socio-political conditions that influence education of various social groups. I would like to end from where I began—the girl who was humiliated by teacher for her caste identity studied up to post-graduation, and joined a 'white collar job'. For her and for many others like me, the system did create opportunities and scope to enter higher education and the labour market even if some of us were first in our families to have studied beyond matriculation. I cannot ignore the role of education and my school even if it was for the emerging urban middle class girl, it did create an opportunity and space to challenge patriarchy, caste and class structures.

I thank Professor Nandini Manjrekar, supervisor of my Ph.D. dissertation, titled 'Social Inclusion in Schools: Experiences of Students, Teachers and Parents'. It was due to her suggestion that I reflected and penned my school experiences.

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Teaching 'Marginalisation' to the Marginalised

Farah Farooqi

I am the Manager of a government-aided minority school situated in the walled city of Delhi. More than sixty percent of the children in the elementary and higher classes of the school are from socio-economically and culturally marginalised backgrounds. The editors of Learning Curve requested me for an article because, as a member of this school community, I have been mulling over issues of exclusion and inclusion. I could have written about the marginalised and subaltern lives of our children. Since, however, many of the readers of this journal are practicing teachers, I felt I should share my reflections of a few Social Science classes that I took in the school in November 2012.

The students in question were from Class VIII and the topic was 'marginalisation', a topic that is part of the prescribed NCERT/CBSE syllabus of the school. We used 'Understanding Marginalisation', a chapter of Social and Political Life, textbook for Class VIII (New Delhi, NCERT, 2008) as a basic text. The interaction I describe happened in Hindi-Hindustani-Urdu. As a Professor of Education I constantly engage with higher education but rarely, as a practicing teacher, with school education. The brief experience recounted here brought to the fore my dilemmas regarding teaching marginalisation to the marginalised in a Delhi middle school and I share these with you.

My interaction with the children made me wonder about several questions. Would this chapter help the marginalised understand their position vis-à-vis other classes, groups and communities better? Would it prompt them to think about possible solutions for the transformation of their lives? Alternatively, would the realisation of the conspiracy of societal structures (and allied agencies) impede their progress? Would it intimidate them into silence and acceptance of the status quo and discourage them from making the requisite effort to change their situation? Furthermore, since all of us have multiple identities, several margins may characterise any society such as those of class, caste, gender, language, religion etc. In teaching this topic we would indeed have to address the question of overlapping identities and compounded disadvantage, but also that of cross-cutting identities. I'll return to this issue towards the end of this piece.

All the children in the class belonged to the Muslim-minority background and were from migrant families of skilled and semi-skilled labourers of U.P, Bihar and Rajasthan. Of the twenty, only six were girls. At least fifteen boys worked in small factories (karkhanas) to supplement family income and the girls helped their parents in income-generating activities such as packing of different materials like shirts, bags, clips, purses etc. The dingy karkhanas served as both the living and working space for many children, who resided here with only their male relatives in order to access 'quality education'. Their homes – if these can be called that – lacked sanitation and ready access to basic facilities such as water, health and playing space.

Following the structure of the chapter, I started to teach by discussing the marginalisation of Adivasis. The many aspects we covered included cultural marginalisation and its linkages with the structures of opportunity and access. Through this the children were able to grasp well what hashiyebandi or marginalisation meant at both individual and societal levels.

The students were quick to relate key issues to their own lives. Regarding their own marginalisation due to language-related expectations, for instance, they had this to say:

- *"Once we went to St George School for a match. Even the little primary-school children were speaking English. We felt sad for we wondered why are we are not able to speak English. We also go to school but have failed to learn."*
- *"When children from rural areas say 'sarak' (the softer 'r') instead of 'sadak', they are ridiculed."*

As we moved to the marginalisation of Muslims, the kids were able to relate to the chapter even more. They had a lot to share in this regard:

- *"Muslims are seen in a demeaning way."*
- *"If Muslims and Hindus fight and the case is in the courts, Muslims are belittled. The case is won by Hindus."*
- *"Villains in films are shown as Muslims."*
- *"Once my neighbor was looking for a job; members of other communities were unwilling to give her a job. When she got one, she had to undergo a lot of humiliation. Is being Muslim a sin?"*
- *"If there is a bomb blast anywhere, Muslims are the first to be named."*
- *"When Muslim women go out in burqa, they are treated with disdain for being different, for not being like the non-Muslims."*
- *"Not just us, but all Muslim brothers are aware that Muslims are harassed. If an untoward incident happens then Muslims are blamed for it. They show the Muslims as culprits even in films."*
- *"Muslim families are economically weak; children are forced to shoulder economic responsibilities. Hence they drop out after school and don't go to college."*
- *"When Muslims were subjected to atrocities and cruelty in Gujarat no one came forward to help them. This happened because no Muslim there had any government job."*

A close look at these responses will make us realise that the children's individual experiences were being legitimised as group experiences. The information and data from the Sachar Committee Report given in the chapter further validated their experiences; it encouraged them to equate these to the experiences of the entire religious community. Their replies dwelt on: experiences of prejudice on using the hijab or burqa, experiences of discrimination by state-run institutions such as the courts and the police, paucity of opportunity in education and employment etc. Some were also able to make the connection between their cultural and socio-economic lives.

I realised what I had achieved through the interaction was only a more pervasive community-level consciousness. The questions which I was now forced to pose to myself were: would their Muslim consciousness and the understanding that this community is a victim of the larger social-cultural structures give them confidence or would it further impede their progress? Or would the children subscribe to the theory of compounded disadvantage and see their marginalisation to be a product of the interpenetration of several factors?It may be fair to argue that in some ways Indian Muslims are marginalised just by virtue of being Muslims. But how far is religious identity alone responsible for the marginalisation of these Muslim worker-children?

Why should the textbook or the teacher have the power to make religion the children's overwhelming identity? Should they not have the freedom to understand that they have an array of identities? If in the future they decide to wage a struggle against their exploitation should they not have the freedom to choose an 'anchor', a 'prime mover' from their multiple identities? But would this not be tantamount to drowning their distinctive minority identity within the larger whole or making it hazy? On the other hand, doesn't 'othering' happen when an overpowering Muslim identity is thrust upon people and their multifarious characteristics are ignored? Shouldn't my children understand the historicity of their position and be encouraged to resist its construction as a 'natural essence'? Shouldn't the constitutional promise of the protection of minorities be revealed to them while still leaving them with the freedom to understand and confront their marginalization? It is important that students and young adults are able to relate to

the multiple facets of their identity; only if they are able to do so, would they be able to recognise the multiple facets of other people's identities as well.

We can see from the children's responses that they had a deep sense of estrangement and alienation. It was important for them to realise that they were a part of a community so that they could draw strength from each other and combat their marginalised position together. The dilemmas I share made me realise the challenging, critical and political nature of the role of a teacher. The challenge was too much for me to bear. I felt I couldn't continue to teach this theme with the same thoroughness and confidence!

Yet, I wanted to take the topic to its logical conclusion. Anil Sethi, whom I have already acknowledged, and who had earlier helped establish the History Club at the school, offered to take the interaction further. The following is an excerpt from the two hour interaction that took place between the students and him:

Teacher (T): We all have several identities. Can you tell us which these are?

Child/Children (C): We are Hindustani but we are also Muslim.

T: Yes; and there could be many others too. You may be from Bihar and you have a language or languages. You may be a boy or a girl. And different income levels can also be the basis of identity. Isn't it?

C: Yes they are!

T: Then why do we say we are marginalised by virtue of being Muslim? In some families boys are given a lot more care and attention than the girls. Such a boy may not be on the margin in his family, but because of the family's low income, he may feel marginalised in society. Can marginalisation be understood through a single lens?

C: "We Muslims are low in caste and status, hence we are marginalized."

T: "And in some situations, Muslims can also be understood as a caste group." The whole community is then regarded as a caste. In many places, upper-caste Hindus observe pollution taboos with Muslims just as they do with the lower castes."

C: "All such Muslims are victims of marginalisation."

T: "If they are the victims, who are the perpetrators?"

C: "They don't get the support from the government."
[A detailed discussion takes place]

T: "Many Muslims of status went away to Pakistan (at the time of Partition). Is this one of the reasons why the government does not pay heed?"

T: "When two or more (marginal) identities operate in tandem, several disadvantages may accrue."

C: "In a few situations it is not the fault of the government. Muslims don't study much."

C: "This happens as they are forced to take up work because of penury."

T: "Then which of their identities is putting them in a position of disadvantage?"

C: "Both of being poor working-class people and being Muslim."

Later a discussion ensued about ways to confront marginalisation. The different responses revealed that most children had understood their different identities as well as the related disadvantages. They had also grasped the interpenetration of identity-factors. They had an understanding of socio-political barriers to their progress, albeit in accordance with their age. They even spoke of solutions. These 'solutions' may be utopian but aren't dreams the raw material of any action?

I initially assumed that the children were open and frank with me because they saw me as a co-religionist. But the non-judgmental environment of mutual respect and trust ensured by Anil made them even happier and willing to share their experiences. This, for them, amounted to an acknowledgement of their position and they appreciated the empathy of a person belonging to some other community. The discussion also helped

the children peep into democratic struggles as a site of possible emancipation:

C: "We will have to launch a movement."

C: "Yes, we'll have a movement for Muslims, a movement against the government so that we can get jobs."

T: "But you had said that marginalization happens also because the concerned people are workers."

C: "Yes, being workers enhances their marginalisation."

T: "So, how will you organize your movement?"

C: "We'll mobilise all the worker-brothers so that we get a just wage, so that we can have houses; the workers' children must be educated well and they must move on in life!"

T: "What really is meant by a mass-movement? How will we organize it? How will it pan out? Will we organise it as Muslims, as workers, or as both?"

I have been very appreciative of the Social Science textbooks prepared by the NCERT, based on the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF, 2005) but they remain - and should remain - only one of the tools in the hands of a teacher trying to navigate dialogic understanding in different contexts. A teacher in a school where most children are from advantaged or from Hindu-majority backgrounds may teach this topic with the different objectives of familiarizing and extricating solidarity for challenges faced by the minority community.

The creators of Social and Political Life, Parts I, II, and III, NCERT textbooks for Classes VI, VII, and VIII have been wise to include a chapter on socio-political marginalisation. In these books they speak of overlapping and cross-cutting identities. In our country, class and caste or class and religion, for instance, can be both symmetrical and asymmetrical. There are locales where the lower castes or Muslims are the lower classes as well (overlap or symmetry) just as there may be locales where this may not be so. Yet, as much research and investigation have shown, the overlap between being Muslim, being poor and being challenged by several other disadvantages preponderates. In the ultimate analysis, the reality of compounded disadvantage that marginalized groups such as Muslims, Adivasis and Dalits suffer from must be brought home to students.

Acknowledgement

I warmly thank my friend and colleague, Anil Sethi, Professor of History and History Education at Azim Premji University, Bangalore, for participating in the exercise described in the article, for discussing with me the reflections I have shared here and for some eagle-eyed editing.

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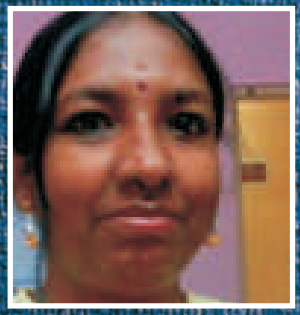


Inclusion in Science Textbooks

S. Indumathi

One may ask: if science is all about facts, abstract concepts, definitions, theories and laws that explain the natural phenomena, how can science textbooks be inclusive? The social context does enter the textbooks through examples. In physics while explaining push and pull, the examples of someone pushing a cart or pushing a heavy object are presented. The question about inclusiveness here would be to ask 'who' is pushing and 'what'? Through such examples, images, illustrations and explanations whether it is inclusive of all learners of all caste, class, religion, gender and other social markers is the question.

Be it science or mathematics or social science the textbooks need to relate to the learners. The question is, does it relate to all kinds of learners and present perspectives and values? A good and effective textbook is that which represents diversity and differences. There are three different issues "a) relevance, b) silence versus candid acknowledgement of differences, and c) the type of inclusion, with genuine respect and tokenism as the two extremes" according to Majumdar and Mooij (2009, p.136). In this analysis I intend to consider the three issues mentioned above as a lens to look at inclusion and exclusion in science textbooks.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 makes important remarks on inclusion of all learners and the way textbooks ought to be written. The content in the textbook should address multicultural and diverse classrooms, diversity in terms of gender, class, culture, religion, language and geographic location according to it. The NCERT textbooks following NCF 2005 makes an attempt. I did an analysis of EVS textbooks earlier and found that it is inclusive of learners of all geographic regions of India, linguistic backgrounds and gender. Now I intend to analyse NCERT science textbook of class eight for the purpose of this article.

Relevant to whom?

The 8th standard textbook has about 18 chapters. There are two characters, Paheli and Boojho, who put across questions, help each other to clarify, have confusions and seek clarification and so on. The book is written in a conversational tone and throughout it starts with or addresses readers as 'you must have seen this, you must have come across this, have you found, you must have not seen this...' In this section, I intend to discuss whom it assumes as readers.

In the lesson on microorganisms, it says that *'Boojho has been invited to a party by his friend and he ate variety of foodstuff'.* The question is, which class groups get invited for parties and have the opportunity to taste or eat variety of food? While discussing preservation, the sentence starts as '*Similarly we keep our food in the refrigerator'*- Can and do all learners keep food in the refrigerator? *'In your childhood you must been given injections and vaccinations'*- how many poor children are vaccinated from diseases or is it assuming that someone is studying in class 8 and not died must have been vaccinated?

In the next chapter on synthetic fibres and plastics the examples used are follows, 'We use many *articles made from nylon, such as socks, ropes, tents, toothbrushes, car seat belts, sleeping bags, curtains etc.'* The text goes on as follows *'My mother always buys PET bottles and PET jars for storing rice and sugar. I wonder what* PET *is!*' PET jars are affordable only for few- the middle and the upper class. Following are some of the images used for plastic.

The children presented in the images are neatly groomed and mostly wear shoes and socks. The above examples are very clear and it is worrisome

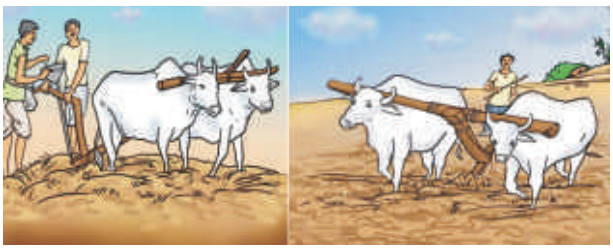
Source: NCERT, Class 8 Science textbook

that it is assuming its readers as middle class, urban children.

Silence and stereotyping of gender roles

In the chapter on crop production and management, all the farmers are men- be it sowing, tilling or pesticide control and the cattle in the pictures are pure white (as pure as milk) and healthy! Women's labour in agriculture is completely silenced and not acknowledged, but the fact is that women are taking care of the farms and lands and men are moving out to cities in search of jobs as agriculture is not dependable source of income. Also, I have not seen cattle as white as this in my life. Have you? The chapter is also silent on various problems in crop production and storage.

In many of the chapters there are names and sometimes images of men scientists- Pasteur,



Source: NCERT, Class8, Science textbook

Fleming and Jenner etc. There is not mention of women scientists contributing to science.

The examples given below stereotypes gendered roles and it is shocking the way the text is written. 'You must have observed your mother boiling milk before it is stored or used.' 'Oh! Now I understand why my mother never wears polyester clothes while working in the kitchen'.

A feminine hand kneading the dough
Source: NCERT, Class8, Science textbook

Bhog's analysis of textbooks reveal that in nearly 50% of the 75 lessons reviewed, men were the only actors. Women appear in marginal roles in science textbooks and there is an absence of positive female role models for girls to identify with. Women were presented in traditional roles as mothers and sisters (Bhog 2002, p. 1640). She argues that Marie Curie's portrayal (who is the only women scientist represented in the textbooks) is also treated through a gender lens as the narrative highlights Marie's domestic responsibilities and the 'achievements of women need to be reined in and normalized through their participation in household activities in contrast to stories of men scientists like Vikram Sarabhai and J.C. Bose' (2002, p. 1641).

In the chapter on synthetic fibers and plastic- all the materials are 'man-made'. Following is the image of a man climbing rock using nylon rope:

Source: NCERT, Class8, Science textbook

The characters introduced to talk about conservation of plants and animals are all men and they are Professor Ahmad and Tibu and Madhavji- the forest guide. The chapter on force and pressure has only images of men and boys exerting pressure. Boys are playing football, hockey and stopping a ball etc. and images of man pushing a vehicle, pulling his cattle, a boy pushing a box, boy pushing a tyre and girls 'playing' merry go around are presented. The driver in the car is also a man.

Source: NCERT, Class8, Science textbook

Science and society

"It appears that for the new generation of students from marginalized backgrounds, textbooks present more a window through which to look at the realities of the dominant group than a mirror reflecting their own realities."(Majumdar & Mooij, 2009). When water itself is a limited source, the textbooks assume that *'Many households use boiling as a method for obtaining safe drinking water'.* The textbook does not seem to problematise many issues and does not bring in the linkages between science and society though there are several chapters in which it can bring the discourse. This textbook is completely silent and neglects the illustration of their lives, it only presents the lives of the middle class, urban male students.

Presenting multiple views, bringing in contrary views in science would help develop critical thinking, reasoning and analyzing various issues. Learning science should also help learners to be scientifically literate and help to take part in democracy actively as citizens. Textbooks should play such a role wherein it should contribute to development of intellectual faculties and enhance equity by presenting conflicting view and multiple realities (Majumdar & Mooij, 2009).One can conclude that this class eight science textbook is not one of this kind.

It is also possible that students do not accept the knowledge presented in the text as it is. They bring in their own interpretations, teachers also play an important role in presenting the text. But textbook is the only source or reading material available for many students in India and they play a vital role and hence there should be care to represent diverse learners and commitment to equity. It is surprising that EVS textbooks till class five present multiple views and take care of diverse learners by giving various examples. Sadly as one moves to higher classes and focuses more on disciplinary subjects, textbooks are not inclusive and this leaves us to wonder whether the nature of discipline and disciplinary boundaries makes it difficult to be inclusive as the focus turns more towards presenting abstract concepts!

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Glitches in the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy: On-field Observation of Lamgara Block in Almora

Jayshree Pande

The inclusive education concept is not new to India but has gained prevalence in last decade when the Right to Education (RtE) became a fundamental right. The underlying thought of inclusive education is that every child is treated equally and given a space to realize his/her true potential. It also implies pedagogical practices inside the school where needs of every individual is duly recognized irrespective of the caste, class, ethnic, gender and ability differences.

Though inclusive education policy seems friendly, effective and accommodating with the myriad needs of the differently-abled children, its often lackadaisical implementation presents a disquieting picture on the ground.

This article reflects the loopholes in the government policies, the apathetic and irresponsible attitude of the community and teachers and plummeting motivation level of the special educators which paints a dismal story of the coveted inclusive education policy in the Lamgara block in Almora.

Some on-field observations:

As a part of the Fellowship programme of Azim Premji Foundation, fellows are required to undertake extensive school observations to understand the complexities of the government education system and the pedagogical practices inside the classroom.

During field visits in the Lamgara block of the Almora district, which is one of the widely expanded blocks of Almora, I came across some glaring problems in the operationalisation of the policy for differently-abled children which I would like to highlight in the present article.

Mainstreaming or ghettoisation

Inclusive education connotes bringing differently-abled children into the educational fold and giving them a suitable learning environment as per their needs, whether in the special schools or regular schools. Also, the 'Zero Rejection' policy in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) gives the right to education to every child and backs mainstreaming of such children in the school, but without adequate resource support and individualised educational plans these children are ghettoised in the schools.

In the absence of special school in the Lamgara block many children with special needs are enrolled in the regular schools and are climbing up the classes but with zilch knowledge levels. In one of the school observations, I found a child who cannot even read, write and speak but studying in class IV. In the absence of the pre-integration programmes and inadequate support in the regular schools, mainstreaming remains a mere formality.

Teacher education programmes

Teacher education remains a weak link in providing inclusive environment in the classrooms. In graduate degree and diploma programmes in teacher education there is no specialisation in children of special needs. This shows the inability of the government to understand the criticality of such programmes and the teachers' preparation in this regard.

Equipping regular teachers with the understanding of the needs and requirements of such children assumes importance in the absence of the special schools in Almora. In absence of the proper knowledge and training, regular teachers were found to be involved in the activities which are detrimental to the all-round growth and development of such children. During one of the

observations at the school level, a teacher segregated a differently-abled boy from other children as he was found to be disturbing them during mid-day meal by throwing his meal in their plates. Since he disturbed other children in the classrooms, he sits and works separately. Is segregation the right answer for such problems? There can be no second thought about it that children require empathy and acceptance from the peers, teachers and community. Only then can they flourish.

In-Service teachers training

Teachers Training is one of the essential components under inclusive education policy and the most worrisome feature too. Positive attitude among teachers is essential for successful implementation of the policy at the school level. The skills and the confidence of the teachers in meeting the diverse challenges in the classrooms and creating a conducive learning environment for children with special needs is a mammoth task which requires adequate resource support to teachers in the form of training, experts' support, etc.

In conversation with Mr. Brijendra Yadav, a hearing-impaired expert and the only resource teacher in Lamgara, I came to know that during his stint of three years, teacher training on inclusive education took place for the first time in the block in 2014. The non-seriousness on the issue by the administration can be gauged by the fact that even after enactment of RtE in 2009 and getting increased support for inclusive education policy, number of trainings are nominal and of shoddy quality.

Negative attitude of the teachers will not prove good to realize the dream of the inclusive teaching-learning processes in the schools. The quality of training can be cited as one of the factors for apathetic attitude of the teachers but most significant is the willingness of the teachers to build understanding on the complex issue of disability, in which trainings can be of great use.

Inadequate resource teachers

Under SSA, every differently-abled child should be placed in the neighbourhood schools with adequate support services. In the RtE Act, there is a provision of special training for such children, whether residential or non-residential.

Mr. Yadav has to look after 89 differently-abled children which is a herculean task to perform. Looking at the topographical constraints in the hilly areas, sometimes 2- 6 months elapse between visits. Now one can easily understand the kind of educational support such children are receiving and how far it proves to be beneficial to them. It is acknowledged by him that a single teacher is inadequate for these children and being a hearing-impaired expert, children affected with other disorders are not properly taken care of.

Contractual employment of the resource teacher is another major deterrent in empowering differently-abled people. One cannot deny the fact that these children require consistent academic, emotional support from the resource teacher the absence of which can hamper their prospects in gaining social and life skills. In the words of Mr. Brijendra Yadav, whose contract recently got over, "I may come and go but my children are still there who needs me every time. Who will look after them?"

Even the trainers imparting home education to such children are either the parents or educated community members who receive training in DIET (District Institute for Education and Training) once in a year. These training modules of few days are not sufficient enough for a lay-person to comprehend the differently-abled children, and their cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. In the words of resource teacher Lamgara, 'Home-based education has become more of a means to earn Rs. 500/- month given to them under SSA'.

Non-cooperative parents and community

Disability has a social nature in which families and community play a pivotal role in development of the potential and in shaping the differently-abled child.

All efforts towards inclusive education will be futile if families are not supportive. During talks with Mr. Yadav this point came out strongly as most of the parents of differently-abled children are not willing to attend the awareness sessions conducted by him. They openly said if they get the money in return they

will come. There can be myriad reasons for such nature of the parents, like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of awareness, etc. In absence of the employment opportunities in the hilly areas, most of the families are involved in daily wage labour and attending a session means losing the day's earning. Also, sometimes out of illiteracy and unawareness the condition of the differently-abled child is misinterpreted as some paranormal condition which can be well treated by the local healers.

Way ahead

There can be no one apt conclusion for such a grave and complex issue but a few propositions may be put forth for the implementation of the policy in letter and spirit in Lamgara block in Almora.

- Running of bridge courses for at least 90 days for such children in a designated place where they can stay and study together. There will be a schedule and curriculum for them to get the maximum benefit out of it.
- Lackluster nature of the trainings can be one of the factors for disinterested attitude of teachers towards it. Instead of conducting trainings within walls trainings can be done on field with such children. It would give the required confidence to teachers to comprehend such children and their requirements.
- Ensure active participation of the parents of such children by including them in the School Management Committees (SMCs) and earmark training sessions on disability issues in SMCs.
- Adequate number of resource teachers and their consistent presence is must for better learning achievements for such children.
- Giving 'Disability Studies' a space in the Teacher Education programmes.

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Including the Differently Abled

Remadevi T.

Introduction

In a society which gives a dimension of 'faith' to disability, considering it as a punishment for the sins of present or former birth, inclusion of people with disability is a long process. Usually sympathy overrides rights based perspective. Preference is mainly or solely for care, cure and rehabilitation (rehabilitation is generally restricted to admitting in an institute which will take care of their basic needs on charitable grounds) and disability is perceived as the problem of individuals and their families.

> "I can never forgive myself for the misery I have caused to my son. Why did I neglect when I was told not to attend the funeral of my uncle while I was pregnant? My child is suffering because of by disobedience. I made him handicapped" - A graduate mother

Even though India is committed to education for all by the 86th amendment of the Constitution making education fundamental right to all children, both the government and private institutions lacks clear understanding about its meaning, relevance and a clear definition[1].

In India disability is getting least priority compared to class, gender, religion, color etc. Only less than 5% of disabled children have joined schools (UNESCO 2000) and only 0.51% of students with disability are enrolled in mainstream educational institutions at school level as noted by a Government study carried in 2004 (UNICEF 2006). The situation is not very different in many other countries too.

Not much data is available regarding the inclusion of disabled in livelihood and in other social, economic and political processes.

The discussion in this article includes the major domains which need to be considered for inclusion, how to address the issue of inclusion and what are the major challenges involved.

Towards inclusion

Inclusion of the disabled should necessarily also mean inclusion in family, community/society, educational institutions, work and elsewhere along with strategies to address the personal and gender issues related to disability.

Personal

The very reason of disability itself leads to lack of self-confidence and limits children's accessibility to experiment and explore compared to their peers. They also lack motivation to realize their inherent potentials, both from their peers and the adult world. The dependence they are forced into and discrimination they experience leads to feelings of worthlessness, frustration, shame etc. which effects their personal and social development.

Gender related

The negative strokes they experience in the 'normal' world can lead to a 'keep-away' attitude, a sort of self-exclusion, especially for girls. A disabled girl is usually an easy target of sexual exploitation by people who generally volunteer to help her.

> "I enjoy swinging a lot. My mother used to take me to the near- by park when I was young. As I grew older we started getting assistance from men around to carry me to the swing from the wheel chair and back, as it became difficult for her and other women. But slowly I started realizing the bad touches by some men who volunteered to help. I could not react as they were doing a favor. So I have decided not to swing anymore, even though I still love it."
>
> - A 14 year old girl with Cerebral Palsy

Family related

Emotions in the family, which range from denial to self-pity to believing quacks and in miracles, usually take a long time to accept realities related to a special child. Families often lack the knowledge and skills and time to cater to the needs of the child along with the required insight regarding the future of the child. This can end up either as over protection or denial of acceptance of the disabled child, both being equally destructive with less possibility of appropriate care and support. Financial issues can add to this scenario along with physical, emotional and social overburdens on the family, especially on the mothers.

Education related

Both education and poverty are interrelated and "Disability may be seen as both a cause and an effect of poverty, and poor educational opportunities for disabled people have a major bearing on the perpetuation of this association" (Goodlad, 2005).

Most schools in India, whether urban or rural, lack resources, including trained teachers and infrastructure, to address the special needs of the children, which in turn lead to low quality of education and/or high dropout rate.

The perceived purpose of educating children with disabilities revolves around preparing them for adjustment to a socio-cultural environment designed to meet the needs of the normal. (Sharma 2002, p.407)

Enrolment of disabled youth for higher education continues to be very low, even after 3% reservation, as they are pressurized to compete with the students from normal backgrounds. In comparison with their special school background, this can result in feelings of inferiority and create adjustment issues. Distance, lack of disabled friendly transport and infrastructure facilities along with the physical/mental limitations to satisfy the requirements of various courses add to this.

Community/Society related

The social model of disability (Oliver, 1990), reflects the view that impairment is not necessarily disabling. Some impairment undoubtedly have an impact on an individual's daily life, for example, having a visual impairment, a progressive condition, a learning difficulty or a mental health difficulty may pose practical and economic problems for people trying to participate fully in all aspects of social experience. However, aspects of the social, economic, cultural and physical environment play a key role in determining the extent to which impairment leads to social exclusion[2].

Psycho-social related

The disabled children usually have a low self-image for the main reason that they are disabled. Inability to perform at par with their peers, social exclusion, the different treatment they experience from the family and society, isolation, lack of motivation, inspiration and aspiration etc are the other major factors which contribute to this condition. Their disability restricts them from getting exposed to the opportunities which are readily available to their peers.

Livelihood related

This is comparatively neglected area mostly due to the overshadowing of an attitude of charity and pity associated with the disabled. Along with their own lack of awareness and skill to assess their potential and ability gap, society also assumes a shield of sympathy and wish to do 'for' them rather than helping or allowing them to do things by themselves.

The absence of research studies in this dimension and lack of job mapping for the disabled adds to the problem. Employers are not open to include the disabled, even after promises for incentives. The labour market which is working on the principle of the survival of the fittest ignores the 'unfits'. Many employers agree with the need for inclusion, but tend to find excuses to practice the same. The tendency of finding cheap labor in disabled also exists.

Not much attention has been given to understanding and bridging the gap between employer expectations and the skills and capacities of the special employees.

How to make inclusion possible

In developing countries interventions are created on the assumption that long-term welfare

assistance should be the primary response to the needs of people living with disabilities (Lang and Upah, 2008). This has emerged from the assumption that the disabled persons cannot be productive and need to be cared for. The social model, which considers disability as an integral and normal part of the society, is yet to gain momentum and has not reached the majority of the population. People's attitudes, beliefs and practices play a major role in bringing about any social change, which is true for disability too. So understanding the attitudes, beliefs, practices and prejudices of people and addressing them appropriately need to be the first step towards the process of inclusion.

The issue of self-exclusion and gender issues needs special attention. Activities to address their poor self-image along with awareness build up on their rights and the 'normal' citizens their duties, is the need of the hour.

Parents and families of the disabled can play a major role in making inclusion possible, but lack the necessary knowledge, skill and time for the same. Even though, certain NGOs have initiated programs for capacity building of parents to enable them to work towards inclusion of their wards, the sustainability of these programs is not guaranteed due to the NGOs' dependency on external funding. A recommended solution could be for the local governing bodies to include this issue in their regular agenda.

Effective implementation of Disability Act and the programs listed in the 12th Five year plan, proper job mapping, plugging the gap between the skills of the disabled and the requirements of job market, sensitization of potential employers are the other domains which needs attention.

Challenges

Accessibility, infrastructure and acceptance of the disabled being the major constrains for inclusion, the lack of proper research also contribute to the same. Many organizations working in the field lack a holistic approach to the issue of disability and their activities are more or less restricted to preparing their beneficiaries getting into semi-skilled works viz. mobile or automobile mechanic, hotel suppliers, telephone/lift operators etc. to name few. The lack of motivated, trained and skilled teachers at schools and employers and work force at the work place are other challenges.

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Centralising Equity, Celebrating Diversity: Practising Inclusion in Our Educational System

Vandana Mahajan

Power of inclusive education for girls:

"Par laga liye hai humne Pinjron mein kaun bathega zara sun lo"

(We have got wings, who will sit in the cage, let the whole world hear this)[i]

-"Meri icha haiki main apne matapita ki yogya beti kahlyaoon" (I wish to be recognised as an able daughter of my mother and father)

-"Mein apne illake ki pehli graduate hoon" (I'm the first graduate from my block[ii])

-"Apna naam kamaoon, par kuch galat naa kar jaoon, iss se dar jati hoon. Umeed yahi rakhti hoon ki aab mauka mila hai to kuch karke dikhaoongi" (I want to earn a good name, but I'm scared of doing something which will be labeled wrong. I hope that given this opportunity I will be able to prove myself.)

-"Darpok aur bheegi billi ki pechaan ko chodkar, pardon se bahar niklne ka safar hai mera". (I have decided to abandon the societal perception of being weak and afraid. My journey has been that of coming out of the veil of invisibility)

-"Maine swaal uthaana tai kiya hai" (I have decided to question the social norms); Besharam banna tai kiya hai maine" (I have chosen to be shameless)

These are voices of some of the young women from Jharkhand, U.P and Bihar whom I had met as part of my recent interactions as a national resource group member of a national women and girls empowerment programme titled 'Education for Women's Equality' (popularly called the Mahila Samakhya programme). These opinions and aspirations articulating a strong and vibrant sense of agency is coming from the experience of these girls who got one more chance to enjoy the maza (fun) of schooling and learning once again after being pushed out of the schools early on in their lives. Thousands of such girls got an opportunity to re-join the mainstream elementary education after going through an educational bridge course programme called Mahila Shikshan Kendra (MSK) which are organised under the Mahila Samakhya programme.[iii]

Was it not for programmes like Mahila Samakhya these girls from very poor and marginalised sections of the society would have their ambitions and aspirations unfulfilled or choked by the repressive and exclusionary socio-cultural norms. The principles of equity and inclusion practiced in MSKs go a long way in developing a sense of self assurance, strong self identity and wellbeing in girls.

Caste based discrimination in education:

Education is believed to have a catalytic influence in fostering more equitable social relations, yet schools and classrooms are not totally free from manifest or hidden prejudices and inequities. The Right to Education Act has made education accessible to the lowest denominator in the society but has failed to check discrimination and humiliation of children from the marginalised sections by teachers and other members of the educational community. These are among the key findings of a report by the Human Rights Watch

[i] *An excerpt from a popularly sung women's empowerment song from the song book produced by Jagori - a Delhi-based feminist resource organisation.*

[ii] *From Saraikela district of Jharkhand*

[iii] *Mahila Samkhya is a national programme under the aegis of the department of education, Ministry of human resource development of Government of India. It is currently running in 9 states of India.*

Group which was released in April 2014. The report titled, 'They say We're Dirty: Denying an Education to India's Marginalised' documents discrimination by school authorities in four states – Delhi, U.P, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh – against Dalits, Tribal and Muslim children. From cleaning toilets to being made to sit separately in the class, the report has documented persistent discrimination of children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in schools. It states that the discrimination creates an unwelcome atmosphere that can lead to truancy and eventually may lead the child to stop going to school.

To address such deep seated social exclusion, in Bihar, a community project under Utthan programme had introduced focused interventions for Maha Dalit (Musahar) community and ensuring participation of the most marginalised social group in elementary education. Another programme, 'Hunar', in the same state, provides vocational education opportunities to Muslim girls. These programmes are considered good examples of inclusive education practice.

Dysfunctional relationship between mainstream languages, indigenous and child's first language:

Another exclusionary practice in our educational system is ignoring the home language of the child and establishing linguistic hegemony of few dominant languages through State-sponsored centralised curriculum and pedagogic approaches. Research shows that bilingualism and multilingualism have benefits for children's academic success, their motivation to achieve, their connection to their family and community and their wellbeing (Wen-Jui and Chien-Chung, 2010; Clarke, 2009). Conversely when children experience a loss or break in their first language they can find it difficult to connect with their cultural heritage and family values without the use of their first language. This can lead to children feeling excluded from family or community groups and experiencing a lack of connection between their first and second (or additional) language (Yazici, Itler and Glover, 2010).

From a situational analysis exercise of educational services[iv] for children from four tribal communities of Orissa showed that the elementary schools and Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) centres in the predominant tribal communities didn't have a very diverse profile of children either linguistically or in terms of different tribal denominations. Children were from one dominant tribal community speaking their home language, however, the ECCE teachers were trained to teach in Oriya medium as they were not fluent in speaking and reading in children's home language, nor did they have sufficient teaching learning support to transact the classroom processes in children's home language and be proficient in bridging between the child's language and the state language which is Oriya.

ERG - IGNUS, the technical educational partner agency of the Orissa State education department, had designed interventions for inclusive ECCE education for tribal children by developing contextualised materials in four tribal languages and training of teachers in using mother tongue based ECCE curriculum.

The above experiences asks us to reflect upon the larger question -

Given the plurality of religious , regional, linguistic, caste, class, gendered and ethnic identities of children (girls and boys), why do our educational programmes fail to address development needs of children who don't fit into the dominant discourse of 'mainstream' identity? Then there are also issues of inequitable access and lack of acceptance of differences and diversity related to age, physical, social and mental abilities of children. There is so much of difference and variety around us that it is impossible to say what is normal and what is mainstream!

It is therefore vital to expand our understanding of equity in education and of the term **inclusion** to address **pluralism** and **diversity**. Diversity encapsulates the myriad of differences between

[iv] *The state education department of Orissa government had hired Delhi-based IGNUS-ERG team, for developing the ECCE curriculum in four tribal languages. This project was supported by BVLF.*

individuals of differing gender, race and culture but also differing languages, religions, values, abilities, socioeconomic status, and any other aspect that makes people different from one another. Together as we support and contribute to each other's lives it is best to accept, understand and protect diversity by being inclusive and celebrate differences. Such a notion of inclusion will ensure that our educational system doesn't allow for discrimination and no hierarchies of educational access, aspirations and outcomes for diverse sections of the society. Irrespective of the definition, equity in education calls for inclusion, empowerment, respect, fairness, justice, a sense of belongingness and no discrimination in any way whatsoever.

Inclusion recognises that the environment presents barriers to participation, access and learning opportunities and aims to reduce these obstacles. Inclusive practice recognizes difference rather than employing a one size fits all approach. However recognising differences and promoting inequality is not to be seen as meaning the same.

Powell (1994) articulates that 'equity' in education in the most inclusive way means that each student will be addressed as an individual, with instructional opportunities, content and approaches that meet his/her specific needs, strengths and interests. All students will be engaged in meaningful learning in a school environment that values differences and encourages students to participate actively in the learning process.

Glimpses of possibilities - examples of inclusive educational practice:

Nationally there are several illustrative examples where the project driven strategies have considerably facilitated school level or cluster level efforts to ensure inclusion of the most deprived. Convergence of a well-designed programme (KGBV), a motivated district office, interested and sensitive implementation partners (NGO or Mahila Samakhya) can help create a well-managed residential school for girls where it is primarily guided by empowering and agency enhancement processes.

Partnership with a local industry or NGO, projects like Learning Guarantee Programme, Namma Shale and Institutional Capacity Development in Karnataka, Hunar and Utthan in Bihar, and special government programmes/projects like Mahila Samakhya and Meena Manch in various States focusing on gender empowerment issues have helped to reach out to girls and boys from very poor and vulnerable families and provide necessary support for learning. These interventions provided mechanisms for the coming together of the community, the school, the administration and external resources (NGO, CSR body) for a sense of joint ownership of schooling processes at different levels[v].

However, the success of all such projects depends on a combination of dynamic and highly motivated head teacher and a team of good teachers and genuine community participation and involvement and politically responsive educational administration. The learning from such innovative projects need to inform the mainstream government educational programme.

Sensitivity of teachers to extremely deprived children and the individual motivation of the head master/head mistress is the ultimate formula of a well-managed, sensitive and engaged school. The onus of responsibility of providing equitable education lies on the teacher. There is tremendous scope and opportunity in teacher education and educational leadership management programmes to meaningfully and sensitively invest in enhancing their knowledge, skills and capacities to support the diverse development and learning needs of children from vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society.

[v] *These good practices were part of the research study entitled, 'School Management for Quality Inclusive Education and Decentralised School Governance'. This was supported by European Union and conducted by ERU Consultants Pvt. Ltd. under the leadership of the National Steering Committee. It was set up as a joint collaboration between Ministry of Human Resource Development and European Union in 2010 entitled 'Exchange of International Best Practices in Education-Actions in India and Overseas' leading to innovation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).*

A paradigm shift in the power relationship between teachers and students from disadvantaged backgrounds is the need of the hour. This can only happen when teachers modify their teaching in ways that bring about academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and social class groups (Banks, 2004) and the teachers are supported by progressive educational administration which is politically committed to uphold the fundamental values and principles laid in our constitution.

"When you enroll a child, you actually enroll a family" (Imtoual, Kameniar and Bradley, 2009). There are several studies and results from projects under DPEP, SSA and non government educational programmes that show that greater involvement of parents in the school and closer school-parent-community linkages could help enhance quality and thereby improve learning outcomes. There is a sense of pride and ownership of the school amongst community members. This would mean creating enabling spaces for teacher and head teacher to form strong and respectful partnerships with families and communities in order to provide the best support for children's learning and development and build mutual accountability mechanisms to identify and remove barriers to equitable and quality education.

To be inclusive in our approach to life's situations requires dialogue that is based on equality and mutuality. The best way to begin is to start with ourselves. Let's begin to look at the world as a beautiful multihued painting with each colour, the smallest of stroke and pattern contributing to its wholeness.

In Rabindranath Tagore's words, "Differences give birth to diversity; Togetherness protects diversity".

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SECTION C
Inclusive Practices

Moving Together: Some Strategies for Inclusion

Jane Sahi and Vanamala Viswanatha

In this brief paper, we would like to share some strategies we evolved to make our classroom a more inclusive space in the way languages were used within the context of the two courses we taught in the MA Ed programme: *Language, Mind and Society (LMS) and Teaching English Language in India (TELI).* The students came from diverse linguistic backgrounds, with varied levels of proficiency in English, especially in formal, academic writing. Despite the fact that the students were doing these courses in their third and final semesters respectively, many students felt oppressed by the demands of writing in English and particularly the argumentative, discursive essay. In addition, several students felt left out as they could not share their experiences and insights due to their diffidence in using English; and this exclusion is surely a loss for all. We wish to argue that language, which can potentially bring the diverse worlds of our students into the class, can equally serve to privilege one exclusive 'world', one particular language and one style of using that language.

The notion of 'inclusion' has often come to mean including those with disabilities, weaknesses or deficiencies of some kind in the mainstream; but we have tried to explore the idea of 'inclusion' in our general teaching context to engage with the whole spectrum of students' strengths and energies, their diverse languages and particular experiences inside and outside the University. This is a particular challenge for teachers who have had to increasingly handle larger classes as there is a real danger that assignments become mechanical, feedback minimal and choices restricted.

We will now describe three overlapping ideas we tried out in our attempt at inclusion: the use of multilingualism as a resource; a wider interpretation of the 'text', and designing a range of assignments and presentations as part of assessment, all of which enabled greater participation and engagement in co-constructing the courses with students.

Multilingualism as a necessary resource

The students' knowledge and affinity to different languages make a potent resource in teaching as they help bring the students' worlds into the class, connecting the old and the new. Different languages extend our horizon and it is a loss if a known language is displaced or replaced. In Tagore's words "A language is not like an umbrella or an overcoat, that can be borrowed by unconscious or deliberate mistake; it is like the living skin itself".[1]

Canagarajah (2002) discusses the different strategies used by students to negotiate English as an unfamiliar language. He speaks of the need for a sense of *appropriation* where the student feels confident enough to be part of something and to use it where it is relevant and useful but not at the cost of abandoning familiar languages and ways of using them.[2]

In our teaching, translation was used as an active tool for negotiation and collaboration, and as a way of understanding 'otherness' by building on the interconnectedness of languages.

In the LMS course, we used proverbs to open up a rich discussion on how culture and language are

[1] *Tagore R. 1922. 'An Eastern University' in Creative Unity.*

[2] *A.S. Canagarajah. 2002. Critical Academic Writing and Multilingual Students. The University of Michigan Press. P. 113*

inextricably linked. The process of translating a proverb provided the context for a heated dialogue about meanings, equivalent words and comparisons. In the assignment on the unit dealing with 'Language, Power and Society', students were asked to select a story, poem or autobiographical narrative from an Indian language of their choice to reflect on the issue of language and power raised in the theoretical readings of Bourdieu and Fairclough.

The TELI course has made a pioneering effort to recast English Language Teaching in the context of India and Indian languages, moving away from a monolingual perspective to a multilingual paradigm. In our class, there was much discussion about the 'judicious' use of the first language in the teaching of English as a second language. Students were asked to come up with lesson plans about how to use the first language *systematically* within task-based teaching.

Students have reported that they often find it problematic to connect to given texts. The texts may be too long and dense or contain unfamiliar and complex ideas. Smaller parts of the text can be highlighted, an advanced organizer can be provided that explains why the text has been selected and what are the key issues to be attentive to and the context of the writing can be provided so that students are able to relate it to what they already know. Some texts can be introduced through a related activity. For example, a chapter from N.S. Prabhu's book (Second Language Pedagogy, 1987) proved to be incomprehensible to nearly all the students without some support. The text needed to be 'activated' to be understood. Not all readings lend themselves so readily to a practical demonstration but this particular text on 'task-based teaching' became clear to students when they were given a lesson using Kannada as a second language round the familiar resource of a calendar. Vanamala, building on the students' existing knowledge of Sanskrit based words and the shared notion of the function of a calendar, was able to effectively communicate in Kannada with non-Kannada students. It enabled students to discover for themselves the nature of 'a task based activity' in learning a second language that did not rely on explicit instruction in grammar, vocabulary or drill to interact in a new language.

Re-defining the nature of a text

In addition to theoretical texts used for analysis and reflection, we used multimedia texts such as films, poems, newspaper clippings, advertisements, cartoons, short stories, biographies and autobiographies. Some assignments required close observation in the form of a mini-ethnographical study or reflection on personal experience.

The idea of including the personal narrative within the academic context has often been viewed with some suspicion and even derision as being superficial, emotional or trivial. However, it is a sound, well-proven educational principle that personal narratives can help link students' current knowledge to the new learning. It is not the personal narrative in itself, but the possibility of reflecting on it as a spectator that supports growth. The more conventional discursive essay often distances the student from the issue and does not include the students' experience and existing knowledge. As Salmon Rushdie writes, *"Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives - the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change - truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts."*[3]

In response to the question, 'Critically comment on your own experience of learning English in relation to other Indian language/s', one student expressed, perhaps for the first time, her discomfort with the language that she is most proficient in. The student writes, *"Out of the six languages I am familiar with, English can be said to leave the rest far behind with regard to the exposure that engaging with any language has given me. And yet, I have largely used the language like a borrowed tool. It never completely felt my own. I always used it the way those in positions of power (teachers, mainstream*

[3] *Rushdie Salman. 1990. One Thousand Years in a Balloon. Viking Children's Books.*

schooling) expected me to… I still believe I have largely (consciously, at least) never attempted at making the language adapt to my own social circumstances."

Another student writing a review of the film English Vinglish related it to her own experience of feeling marginalized by languages. She writes,

"The movie was basically about dignity and honor, not language. She was learning English not because she had its necessity but because she could not bear the insult. Most of the time we also do the same. We don't think that if we know seven languages except English but if you don't know English then it is a big deal."

There is a real challenge for students to write about their personal perspective within the context of an assignment because an intrinsic part of academic discipline is to consciously look at an issue from different perspectives and to shift from a given opinion to an informed, balanced argument. Ira Shor writes about the need for closeness and objectivity,

"*We gain a distance from the experience by abstracting it from its familiar surroundings and studying it in unfamiliar, critical ways until our perceptions of it and society are challenged. "*

In addition to looking at classroom observation in the school context, the University itself can be a fruitful site for learning. In the LMS course, students had the option of doing a mini- ethnographical study about classroom discourse in the University setting. For some students this was perhaps the first opportunity of consciously analyzing classroom participation from different points of view. One student wrote imagining herself as a Tamil student who has minimal skills in English and concluded,

"*Would it have been possible for me to even converse with my professors or classmates if I was not familiar with English? I would admonish myself in participating in class, at the fear of sounding foolish, for I would not know how to put my ideas forward in English. To a great extent, it will be an alienating experience and I would feel like a fish out of water. It would not be the same as speaking to someone from my own culture. If I had to adopt English as the language through which I give meaning to my thoughts, it would require me to conceptualize and experience the world in a different way."*

Designing assignments and presentations that require students to actively seek out the connections between theoretical texts and practical issues.

Patterns of assignment and feedback often indicate what is actually valued and so it is essential that theories of inclusion are put into practice where it is significant for students within the context of institutional requirements.

A process portfolio is one mode that offers a more flexible tool for written assignments that values both the process and the product. It also provides a wider range of submissions in terms of size, genre and state of completion. In addition it supports both a cumulative and summative way of assessment and gives a chance for revision, improvement and critical awareness of the process on the part of the student.

A significant aspect of the portfolio is a different understanding of who the audience should be for assignments. Usually a grade with or without feedback is the end of the exchange. We tried to think how students could be supported to build on a draft and to see an assignment as a way of beginning of a conversation rather than a conclusion.

On one occasion three students were asked to discuss another student's work and present it both orally and in writing. A framework for analysing features of good writing was suggested and students were asked to comment on the development of ideas, the organization of the essay, sentence fluency, the authenticity and power of the writer's voice and in addition to looking at conventions such as spelling and punctuation.

Students largely gave each other critical but sensitive and constructive feedback. It was a learning experience both in terms of exposure to different points of view and it also served to help students to be more critical of their own work, in light of the suggested framework for analysing good writing.

In conclusion, it is essential to challenge students and not merely to provide easy options or dilute the seriousness or complexity of ideas. Freire discusses a radical understanding of 'rigour'.[4] A Pedagogy for Liberation. Rigour does not lie in dealing only with abstract ideas in isolation which is bound to support awareness and depth in thinking; it is as much in bringing practice and theory together in engaging inter-subjective and multilayered ways. Texts need to be varied, accessible and generated by students themselves in a variety of languages to establish an inclusive classroom.

[4] *Freire P. and Shor I. 1987.A Pedagogy for Liberation. Praeger.*

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Specific Learning Disabilities - Mainstream Classroom Contexts

Neena David

Kabir's parents look tired, knowing that this seventh grade parent-teacher meeting would be identical to all the teacher interactions they have had in the past. Teachers would repeat their concerns about his poor reading skills, sloppy handwriting, incomplete classwork, numerous spelling errors and his reluctance to engage with academic tasks. Kabir's report cards consistently had the standard teacher comments- needs to improve, can do better if he works harder. His parents know him to be an averagely bright child, an observation often corroborated by his teachers in school and his tuition teacher, but his academic skills and performance seemed to indicate otherwise. Why, they wondered, was he being so lazy, unmotivated and difficult? The school recommends that Kabir visit a psychologist to receive a formal learning assessment, the parents initially resist the idea insisting that their son is 'not mad' but agree to it eventually.

With every referral I receive for a formal learning assessment involving a high school adolescent, there is recognition that poor grades are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Assessment sessions unravel years of the adolescent battling negative parent, teacher and peer attitudes, experiencing failure practically on a daily basis in the classroom, parents feeling helpless and pressurised and teachers expressing their limitations in working with learning difficulties in a mainstream classroom. Research on children who are challenged by classroom difficulties indicate that negative early learning experiences constitute significant risk factors (Hamre and Pianta, 2001) and these may have possible long term implications on future academic choices, career options and psychological well-being.

Kabir's story is not an unfamiliar one; it is unfortunately played out across millions of families of school going children in India. Research conducted in Maharashtra reported that the delay between attention and learning difficulty symptoms first being noticed and the child being diagnosed was nearly six years on an average (Karande et al., 2007). The delay is compounded by the fact that while there are definite early warning signs evident in elementary school, these become pronounced when the child enters middle and high school. Poor early identification systems and the quality of elementary education a child receives, impact the severity and prognosis of learning difficulties.

What are specific learning disabilities?

Chronic scholastic underachievement in a child is typically the most common reason for teachers and parents to seek assessment for their child. While this may indicate the presence of a primary learning disability, it can also be secondary to other psychological or social conditions. The term Specific Learning Disability (SLD) is often used interchangeably in India with learning difficulties or to describe students who are regarded as 'slow learners'. SLD however constitutes a distinctive diagnosis and refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. These may manifest itself as difficulties in the child's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. SLD excludes learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA, 2004).

SLD is often referred to as the 'hidden disability' for its ability to go undetected and confound parents and teachers alike. The child with SLD has an average to above average range of cognitive functioning and hence looks and sounds like any regular child in the classroom, but may have significant difficulties with tasks involving reading, comprehension, spelling, writing and/or math. The severity of difficulties exists on a continuum ranging from mild to severe.

SLDs are currently viewed as neurologically based deficits occurring in specific cognitive processes. Research on what causes SLD points to the involvement of genetic factors and/ or brain insult in the antenatal, natal and postnatal periods. There is no cure for SLD, however, with early and consistent intervention, the individual learns to cope effectively.

SLD in the classroom

Researchers warn us that epidemiological studies of SLD in India are challenged by a complex array of socio cultural, economic, language and quality of elementary schooling issues (Karanth, 2002). Available figures for the prevalence of SLD in India appear to vary from 6 to 14% of the general school going population. The ground realities of these figures indicate that the mainstream classroom and the teacher will continue to be the only viable points of providing intervention and support for the vast majority of students with SLD. Schools that are inclusive in their teaching philosophy and pedagogy are especially beneficial to children with SLD.

Teachers often cite large classrooms, lack of training and a rigid exam - driven curriculums as barriers to providing meaningful learning opportunities for children with SLD. There are also those who display a sense of acceptance of differences in the classroom and a willingness to engage with them. Policy makers and school managements seeking to promote inclusive practices would need to recognize that teachers' levels of demonstrating acceptability for inclusive classrooms are influenced by their personal belief systems and by a variety of context and programme specific variables.

Possible indicators of SLD

The process for diagnosis should take into account the child's response to any intervention measures, inputs from teachers, parents and performance scores from a variety of curriculum based and standardised tests administered by a psychologist. While the teacher is not required to make diagnostic judgments, she could be watchful of possible learning indicators of SLD in a child and initiate appropriate interventions. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Manual (SSA, 2003) has a checklist for SLD which may also be used for initial screening by teachers in regular schools. Possible indicators of SLD listed in Table 1 are not a comprehensive representation, but are commonly occurring difficulties observed in the classroom. These may co-exist with areas of strength and talent in the creative/performing arts, sports, etc, and may appear as different clusters with varying levels of severity in children.

Table 1 - Possible indicators of SLD

Written Skills
- Dysgraphia- difficulties with writing - Written work is of a poorer standard when compared to oral ability - Letter confusion, presence of letter or word reversals - Messy written work – poor letter formation, inconsistent size and spacing, frequent erasures and scored out words - Spelling errors- same word may be spelt differently in a piece of writing, errors may indicate phonetic or bizarre spelling - Poor pencil grip

Reading Skills
- Dyslexia - difficulties with reading and comprehension - Has difficulty in sound blends and syllable division - Difficulty in sound discrimination - Difficulty with rhyming words - Inconsistent reading levels - Poor reading fluency and comprehension - May lose place while reading, misses or adds or substitutes words - Avoids reading activities such as reading aloud

Numeracy

- Dyscalculia- difficulty with numerical concepts
- Confusion with number line
- Confusion with number sequencing and place value
- Number reversals
- Confusion with computational signs
- Difficulty with learning multiplication tables

Motor Skills

- Dyspraxia- difficulties with motor skills
- Possible difficulties with gross and fine motor skills
- Difficulties with colouring, buttoning and tying laces
- Directional difficulties- left and right, above and below, cardinal directions on maps
- Difficulties with initiating and maintaining motor sequences

General Behaviour

- Easily distracted- lost, looks preoccupied
- May not follow through or comprehend instructions
- Incomplete classwork
- Difficulties with skills of organisation
- Performs better if actively supervised

Classroom interventions

Working to effectively meet the learning needs of children with a SLD in a mainstream classroom is a challenging task yet one that the classroom teacher will be required to undertake. These are few practical suggestions that teachers could consider in their interactions with students who have a learning difficulty:

1. Get informed- read up on difficulties the student demonstrates.
2. Accept that the child has learning difficulties and that your proactive and supportive stance is crucial to the child's success.
3. Communicate and collaborate with the parent. Regularly share positive feedback and concerns about how the student is doing at school.
4. Accommodations can be made in instruction, classroom setting and assessments. Examples of accommodations for students with LD include: breaking down tasks into smaller steps, extending time to finish assignments or tests, letting a student borrow notes from another, appointing classroom buddies, preferential seating, allowing for verbal responses on tests etc.
5. Certain state exam boards and national exam boards (CBSE, ICSE, NIOS) provide accommodations for students who receive a formal SLD diagnosis. Teachers should be aware of these provisions and encourage the student to use them. These are not to be viewed as 'crutches', they are what level the playing field and enable the child with SLD a fair chance at experiencing academic success.
6. Actively teach study skills, these would include organizational skills, problem solving, time management, learning strategies, effective review strategies etc.
7. Offer specific and constructive feedback. For example- instead of stating 'can do better' on an assignment, specify exactly what areas the child needs to improve on- vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation etc.
8. Frequently check for understanding and encourage the child to take part in class discussions.
9. It is helpful to provide supervision at the beginning of a task and to then monitor progress.
10. Establish a rapport with the child and frequently provide positive reinforcement.
11. Simplify content for the child by focussing on the core learning objectives of the lesson.

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Postcolonial, Inclusive Education in the Southpoint Vidyashram

Nita Kumar

As an answer to the question, "What would constitute an excellent *Indian education* for *Indian children?"* the school called The Southpoint Vidyashram was set up in 1990 in Varanasi, U.P. by our society NIRMAN. The answer to the above question was two-fold. One, the education must be inclusive. It must include children from any and all backgrounds, varying by class, religious or regional community, gender, and ability. Indian schools, obviously, are *not* inclusive. Students were differentiated always according to class and often by other criteria as well. Two, the education must be *excellent.* Children must be taught skills that empowered them to fulfil dreams, and more difficult, made into lifelong learners. We called these approaches 'postcolonial' and developed them continuously with research in our Centre for Postcolonial Education.

What does the name 'postcolonial' mean? We call the problems of Indian education *today* 'colonial', by which we mean: (i) there is a hierarchical ideology among educators, in which some children are believed to be constitutionally incapable of learning, and (ii) there is a poverty of resources and concepts as to how to teach in progressive, child-centred, inclusive ways. By calling the solutions 'postcolonial' we mean: (i) our schools should embody the politics of equality, where everyone may be regarded as a learner, regardless of family and community background, values and practices, customs and habits and (ii) we should create resources, from our own repertories of practices, including curricula, teacher's education and the arts. Our findings have been that both these solutions are precisely doable. They depend on the construction of a robust family-school relationship.

In this paper I will expand briefly on our journey from 1990 to today. Our hope is to enlarge the dialogue and to reach out further to assist others with similar solutions.

THE POLITICS OF EQUALITY

The discourse of the child

We can re-construct the discourse of the child in India from various sources: mythology, observation, interviews, fiction, and historical research. We come to the interesting finding that there is a *double* discourse, according to which a child is simultaneously two things. One, a child is malleable. Education is a powerful process and any child who undergoes it is likely to be transformed, not only intellectually, but also socially, emotionally, psychologically and discursively. The power of education to change one's life cannot be exaggerated. The second discourse is that some children can never be changed. There is a core essence within some people that leads to their utter resistance to change.

We recognise the hierarchical roots of this double discourse. The children who are supposedly resistant to education are those from certain classes and communities already labelled 'backward'. But ironically there are many such children in middle - class, modern families as well and then it is individual children who are characterised by this intransigency.

The solution that we adopt in our school and would like to propose to others is to ignore this second discourse and work to expand the first one. When teachers are taught methods and given ideas, as to how to work with a variety of children in their classrooms, when difference is purposefully addressed, then they work within the first

discourse. They recognise that we have the concepts in our own cultures and move on to only use them imaginatively to create teaching that includes everyone in its target group.

The Discourse of Modernity

The big danger is to hold a static concept of 'Indian culture' such as is done by many scholars, educators and lay people and then to be unable to devise solutions to problems since 'culture' is such a big thing to fight. Our approach is that culture is complex and multi-layered, dynamic and fluid – or, as I put it, it consists of multiple discourses. There are discourses about some aspects of modernity, specifically about individualism and choice that could hinder children's growth or could empower them. One could strategically choose to highlight selected discourses and sideline others and those inside the culture will feel comfortable and be co-operative.

In brief, the aim here is that the classroom not be the typical disciplinarian one where the teacher is the sole authority in power. The separate identities of children must be recognised, and in spite of age difference with the teacher and other background and familial differences between students, each one must be given dignity and respect. This is practically expressed in the spatial layout of the classroom, in the procedures and rules made for everyday functioning and in bigger rituals and language use. It is more intricately expressed in the curriculum, in which every single topic could be taught with an approach that respects the interests of children, their burgeoning views of themselves and their worlds, their energies and imaginations, and their huge abilities to reach far beyond their immediate surroundings. Plans could be made where, given age levels, the total approach in the classroom is based on the most fundamental principles of democracy and inclusiveness.

The adult as learner

For these fairly profound changes in the ideology of the school – to treat the child as always competent to learn, always engaged in learning albeit at her own pace and always equal to others – teachers have to be helped to conceptualise themselves in new ways. They too are part of a multi-layered plural set of discourses that constitutes Indian society and culture. In their own homes, for instance, they have myriad rules. At the same time, certain basic rules, regarding time, or the rights of individuals, may be lacking, which are very necessary in school. That teachers bring their home cultures into their school practice is not to be bemoaned, but to be worked with.

We have developed three strategies to work with teachers to enable them to break out of the cycles wherein they mechanically reproduce whatever they themselves have experienced in their own less-than-adequate schools, and their otherwise-culturally-rich families.

(i) An intellectual approach. Teachers are treated as intellectuals who are educated, like ideas, and can analyse. They are taught through select lectures and discussions of pertinent topics, ranging from the effects of colonialism in India, to caste, to the media, to gender roles. The teaching is very carefully crafted to be interactive, as a model for the best kind of teaching that they should also become comfortable with in their own practice.

(ii) A technical approach. Teachers are treated as smart and professional workers who deserve to be given a work place and environment within which they can fulfil the requirements expected from them – to both professionally complete their duties, and to be imaginative in that they deal with a dynamic group called children. We design to give them the maximum support for a child-centred classroom and a smooth working schedule, as well as a stream of ideas regarding how to live out the philosophy intended to be put into practice. Not to get into the minutiae, but the designs include bookshelves, storage space, soft boards, floor and child-friendly seating, teaching resources, light and air.

(iii) A performative approach. Teachers are required to play many theatre games, do exercises, and master the elementary arts of performance. Philosophically, this leads to the ability to radically re-conceptualise oneself, one's behaviour and one's potential. More pragmatically, it opens the doors of the

imagination to work with space, other people, both colleagues and students, and undertake tasks more creatively. Theatre is the single most potent source of radical re-structuring and breaking out of the cycles of reproduction we are all trapped in.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF INCLUSIVENESS

The curriculum

Now we come to the second part of the two-fold need of change in Indian education, the first for the politics of equality, the second for the technology for equality. As much of the discussion on curriculum and our own experience tells us, there are many possible approaches to the same subject-matter, some of which marginalise children of certain backgrounds more than others. The bigger, Indian, problem is that the teaching is so uninteresting in most of our schools that even children who are intelligent and love to learn get put off by school work, and become poor students, or even drop out of school. We have a two-pronged policy in our school: first, to make the teaching rich, sufficient, and exciting, so that children are wooed to learn and can complete their work themselves, going on to become independent learners. Not to have to depend on adults at home for home-work assistance is crucial in breaking the cycle of exclusivity in good education. Second, we have the more ambitious policy of actually devising texts and workbooks which seek to use community, local and national narratives in an imaginative, even fantastical way. Following on Kieran Egan's arguments, our belief is in the child's capacity as artist, poet and philosopher, to be able to deal with content that, though familiar, is exoticised in a way that children's imaginations demand.

The hidden curriculum

The easiest to grasp, this is the constant attention to detail with the posing of the simple question, "What is the child learning from this?" remembering that to not teach is often also to teach. For instance, if there is a Hindu festival and children are taught what it is, that conveys to them the sense of its importance to adults. If there is a Muslim festival and children are not taught what it is, it similarly teaches them of its lack of importance to the adults concerned. More subtle things, such as pictures on the wall, the very nature of the wall, as well as every single practice or occurrence under the school roof and in outside spaces, teaches children how to think about themselves and adults, about their world and the adult world they are learning to negotiate.

Conclusion

The proof always lies in the doing. We firmly believe that claims cannot be validated by reading policies. Curriculum is not what is planned but what is executed, not what is intended but what is experienced. Teachers may be judged not by their years or degrees of training but by observation in the classroom. So, the above is the briefest introduction to a very detailed plan that is daily lived out in The Southpoint Vidyashram, which is proud to invite one and all to observe in person and learn from its philosophies and practices on its site.

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A Fishy Innovation From Hong Kong

Anuradha Naidu

I stood at the doorway and watched as the little group of kindergarteners filed into the art class. They were filled with anticipation. Roselyn, my young colleague, always set up her art session with a little takeaway for every type of learner. As I watched her work with the children I was filled with awe. Making your own choice, she said, was important. Every child is creative, and has his or her unique style. Children have different views, some want action and like to work in threes and fours. They are happiest in a group. Some want to gain mastery over the brush and prefer to work alone and a few want to be free to explore.

Roselyn was always willing to take a child with special needs in her Kindergarten class. She felt that teaching children to be kind and caring is the way to lay the foundation for life. Roselyn was a creative teacher and I loved collaborating with her. We always looked for solutions together and she would readily try out new strategies and give me feedback a couple of weeks later. Soon we understood each other well, and prepared in advance for new experiences that would include John. John was on the Autism Spectrum[1] and would sidle his way out of sessions when everybody else was singing, playing, or hanging out together happily.

The art class had begun. The emotional involvement was intense, especially since a fish[2] was the focus that day. John walked in, long after the others had settled in. He was unsure of what to make of the painting session. Roselyn had bought a fresh pomfret from the Hong Kong wet market that morning. There was a faint fishy smell in the air that mingled with the odour of poster paint. Her plan was to bring the sea world alive, through this rather unusual painting project. Each child had the opportunity to paint the fish with colour and rub her art paper on it to capture the pattern of the scales. John watched hesitantly. I held my breath wondering how this session would turn out with a child with myriad sensory issues. Will he touch the paints and the fish? Will the smell upset him? Would he allow the teacher to assist him? Would he sit with the others as they waited for their turn? Was there going to be a huge meltdown given the unfamiliarity of the fishy situation?

My heart was beating hard. John and I had worked for many months, one to one, to overcome the fear of new textures and sounds. This was our big moment. Roselyn went on with her lesson. In clear, precise steps she demonstrated how to handle the fish, and the paints. She invited each child to come forward to take a turn. The children went about their creative work and settled in groups or individually to carry on painting their fish templates in monsoon grey and rainbow colours. There was stillness in the room. John looked on watchfully. When everyone had done, Roselyn looked at John and said:

[1] *Autism is a neurological disorder which affects the social and emotional areas of the brain leading to challenges in communication, social relationships and imagination. It typically appears after first two to three years of age and is more common in boys. http://www.thenationaltrust.co.in/nt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=130*

[2] *Mainstream ideas for sensory play include water and sand tables, finger painting, playdoh, printing, bubbles and ice. Plastic Aprons and table cloths, and a washing machine installed at the Kindergarten, will make cleaning easy.*

"Have a go!" To my utter delight, John ran forward to take it on! Yes, it was a big moment for us!

I have often asked myself what would be the best way to support a teacher in an inclusive Kindergarten classroom. Especially since I am an Early Interventionist, it always works to stay in the shadows of the classroom and observe, emerging at the right moment to appreciate the efforts the teacher has made. The analysis comes later. Warmth and respect is the foundation for collaboration. Despite all the challenges, it works!

Pictures source:
http://www.learning4kids.net/list-of-sensory-play-ideas/

Until recently, **Anu** worked in Hong Kong as an Early Interventionist with children with special needs in the 0-6 age group, under the auspices of an early education centre sub-vented by the Hong Kong Government program serving the non-Chinese-speaking population. She trained as a special educator at Vidya Sagar, Chennai, 20 years ago and was introduced to the trans-disciplinary approach there. Her practice has evolved to reflect this as she constantly strives to weave together therapy, education, and alternative communication into a fun-filled process of learning for her students. She may be contacted at anuradha.naidu@gmail.com

The Resource Room – External Supports

Reena Ryall

This article analyses the role of the regular teachers, principal and management in helping to sustain the resource room.

Over the years it has been seen that teachers are disinclined towards the policy of inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom. Their concerns come from varied factors like amount of time such children might need, poor performance, how it might affect the other children, as well as their own sense of inadequacy about their training and skills to handle such situations. However it is known that teacher attitudes impact student's educational outcomes[1] and when it is a negative attitude it is a cause for concern. A resource room is a classroom where children can receive individual academic instruction for goals listed in the IEP (Individual Educational Programme) which will help them learn strategies that will improve their performance in the class. The resource room is particularly beneficial to children with dyslexia and other learning disorders as direct individual teaching is required. In the resource room children receive learning support in a positive environment. The concept of the resource room facility or the learning support facility has not yet caught on in India. Though awareness levels have improved in recent years, the principal and school managements still fail to see the crucial link that the resource room provides in the circle of education. Mostly viewed as a specialised area connected with special education, catering to the needs of too small a number of children, creating a financial burden that is considered optional, most schools are of the opinion that they can manage without a resource room. This is a case of being penny wise and pound foolish. A close analysis will highlight how crucial and beneficial early identification of educational problems is and how early intervention can actually improve the overall performance of not just the handful of children enrolled for learning support but the whole class.

True purpose of the resource room

The resource room has been misconstrued as a dumping ground for 'unmanageable' children. Regular teachers view the resource room as an alternative to classroom disaster. However the resource room serves several important purposes:

- The only purpose of the resource room is to tap the underlying potential of a child whose performance in tests and exams is way below actual potential or ability, through innovative highly individualised teaching methods.
- The resource room has the amazing and valuable capacity to recognise and assess learning difficulties as early as possible as well as draw up early intervention programmes for children as early as kindergarten.
- This actually minimises the number of children who develop learning problems due to secondary factors. The resource room also has its eyes open for children who might develop late emerging learning problems.
- The resource room is the unrecognised missing link – the answer to regular teacher woes, to the math teacher who is at his/her wits end as to how to teach comprehension of statement sums or multiple methods to do multiplication, or the history teacher who is not up to mind mapping of every chapter.

[1] *Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E. (1997). Looking in classrooms (seventh edition). New York: Longman.*

- The resource room is a treasure house of classroom activities for all topics in all subjects. If a systematic interactional process between regular class teachers and resource teachers is put in place, exchange of ideas, exchange of knowledge and creativity leads to a situation where the resource room could actually become redundant with every teacher becoming acquainted with ways to provide individual assistance to needy students within the classroom itself.

The attitudinal barriers to the success of the resource room

The resource room faces many obstacles in its pursuit of survival. School managements dread the expense, regular teachers dread extra workshops that tell them how to run their classes, parents dread labelling of their child, and children dread becoming the object of ridicule while being hustled off to the resource room during their favourite periods like art, music, games etc. It is fair to say that the only challenge is in the mindset of everyone.

- **The principal and school management**

  The principal and school management should weigh the long term benefits and invest in not one or two special educators but a team of special educators who can provide regular training to all teachers in the school, increase the coping ability of the teacher who has to manage children of varying profiles, which is becoming the reality of today's classroom. If the school wants to up its results, up its commitment to education, up its recognition of being a really 'good' school then it should provide access to early identification, informal assessment, and remedial help to children who require it. The difficulties arise when principals are ignorant of learning disabilities and fail to take cognizance of its increasing prevalence. Small mindedness takes over when there is reluctance to part with the salary for the special education teacher viewing it as an option rather than an antidote. On the other hand, the resource room that enjoys the support of the principal and management runs for years and years unhindered in rendering vital support to many children who would have otherwise not even had a slim chance of making it to the next grade. The resource room becomes the clinic where early remedy is the best remedy. It has been seen that management attitudes to the resource room make all the difference. The support given by the principal strongly dictates teachers' methods of teaching as well as behaviour towards children with disabilities[2]. Today we know that when the school administration is supportive teachers are more willing to accommodate children with disabilities[3].

- **Regular teachers' attitudes**

  One of the main barriers to integrating students with disabilities has been teachers' attitudes[4]. This is disheartening as the whole process of providing learning support to a child does not happen in isolation. It is a chain which gets broken if any one link is not strong enough to hold the system in place. When a child is identified as having learning disabilities it is only right to provide means to the child whereby academic performance can improve. If this commitment is lacking in the general teachers then the resource room finds it very difficult to stay afloat. For all teachers to have a supportive enthusiastic attitude towards the resource room it is important to provide teachers with positive experiences through introduction of inclusive practices in the classroom, pre service training and regular insight into the learning process. An important study suggested that teacher's

[2] *Ross-hill(2009) Teacher attitude towards inclusion practices and special needs students. Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs Volume 9, Issue 3, November 2009*

[3] *Soodak, L.C.; Podell, D.M.; Lehman, L.R. (1998). Teacher, student, and school attributes as predictors of teachers' responses to inclusion. Journal of Special Education, 31 (4), pp. 480-498*

[4] *Avramidis, E. & Norwich, B. (2002). Mainstream teachers' attitudes towards inclusion/integration: a review of the literature. European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17(2), 1-19.*

attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by their previous experiences in inclusive classrooms[5] thereby highlighting the importance of exposure to the resource room and its related activities in the classroom.

- **Teacher training**

  Teacher training courses in India have failed to cover special education needs adequately. Teachers are unaware and if aware then resistant to differential teaching. For the success of the resource room even if regular teachers are not trained in understanding learning disorders, it is imperative that they have some knowledge about it. The current training for teachers does not expose teachers to children with learning disabilities at all. The view is then that the resource room is a place where specialised teachers babysit children who are unable to cope in class, and often classroom teachers label children as badly behaved when in truth they have sincere difficulties in picking up reading, spelling and writing. This is because they are unable to recognise children's symptoms correctly. The attitude towards the resource room is condescending. This attitude greatly underrates the improvement of the child. Given that children with special education needs are present in every classroom and on the rise, it is crucial to improvise and update the syllabus in all teacher training institutes. In schools that employ teachers with willingness to teach children with disabilities, the attitudes towards the resource room are highly positive. This contributes to effective communication between the resource room, classroom, parent and back. It also facilitates classroom support as the teacher might be more flexible, patient, improvising and encouraging. Often with cooperative class teachers the child is given more time, assistance and options. Such teachers work with the resource room in helping to identify children for assessment, share portions and strategies as well as aim for academic success of the child with learning problems.

In conclusion, learning support is not an option: it is the right of every child. In view of the reality of a classroom where differential teaching is the only option, then the resource room becomes its shoulder to lean on by offering a range of services that belong not just to the purview of special education but to the scope of general education as well.

[5] *Leatherman1, Jane M. Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion: Factors Influencing Classroom Practice. Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education Vol 26(1) 2005*

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Reaching Out... A Different Approach to Inclusion

Sarala Mohan Raj

"If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn". To a large extent, it is these words of Ignacio Estrada that guides us in reaching out to students who experience difficulties in learning and therefore are unable to cope with the demands of mainstream education. Students, who fall scholastically behind their grade-level peers time and time again, are bound to feel inadequate about their capabilities, be low in self esteem and lack self confidence. A section for alternative studies, for 12 to 15 year-olds (Std. 7 to Std. 10) has been our answer at Vidya Niketan School, to assist students with academic difficulties – our way of reaching out and giving back to society. This initiative has been a part of our school since the last 12 years.

Understanding the needs of adolescents with academic difficulties, we focus on their all-round development, their socio-emotional learning and, spiritual and psychological well-being. No adolescent should be deprived of a school life just because he/she is unable to cope with the academic curriculum. As educators, we understand the depth of learning that takes place over and above the academic knowledge that students are expected to acquire, by just being in a school environment.

Our objective is to provide a school environment for students who would otherwise drop out of school or face repeated academic 'failures' being unable to cope with the demands of the mainstream academic curriculum. They pursue the open school curriculum while simultaneously attending school, and learn the required social skills of interacting with people of different age groups, learn the skills of negotiation, learn and understand societal nuances and societal expectations and become responsible citizens. This learning can only take place, to a large extent, within a school environment which is all encompassing.

"That the child can achieve much more when he feels secure inside, when he is valued and loved and believes in himself and has a sense of pride", is a widely acknowledged fact. This is what we assist our children to achieve. Our school environment ensures that they are provided with a number of opportunities for social interaction, emotional growth, and personality development. We believe that each one of them is unique and has a special potential waiting to be tapped. They are encouraged to pursue extra-curricular activities that they take a liking to. We work towards empowering our students to become socially and emotionally strong and capable individuals.

Integration and inclusion takes place when the students get to interact with the mainstream students during the morning assembly, common games periods, sports day, annual day, graduation day, etc. But for the purpose of academics, they surely benefit from a small-sized classroom environment, to proceed at an individualized pace of learning, where they are coached and prepared for the open school exams. To be able to enjoy all the facilities of a school environment, be it the infrastructure, or the co-curricular activities, or the social life, and simultaneously work towards their goal of completing their secondary education, is our aim.

With the increased levels of awareness and acceptance amongst parents of children with academic difficulties, we have included a grade 7 class for 12-year-olds this academic session. We are always looking for newer approaches and solutions to practical problems that our children could face.

Knowing very well that team work that includes our students, their parents and the teachers/school is what will make it possible for our students to reach their potential, we involve our parents at every step of the child's growth and development during their school years with us.

How do our students grow in confidence and self-worth?

Once every term, our students are encouraged to face an audience of 1200 students and 100 teachers to present the school assembly. They are given opportunities to show case their talent before the whole school and participate in the Independence Day and Teachers Day celebrations, alongside their mainstream counterparts. Their sense of achievement and accomplishment after each performance instills in them a sense of pride in their capabilities which helps them grow in confidence at an emotional, social and psychological level. Academically, pursuing an open school curriculum along with peers who also experience difficulties in learning, gives them a sense of having a level playing field to perform on.

Our school environment is their stepping stone to success, which assists them in completing their secondary education. The fact that 99% of our students get back into mainstream education after completing their Std. 10 through the open school is our satisfaction. Each step forward that each student takes after coming to us, which moves them forward in life fills us with joy and pride.

The system of inclusive education that we have in place differs from the true sense of the term or as practiced elsewhere, but has been rewarding for our students, parents, and teachers. While nurturing, supporting, guiding and coaching our students over the last many years, our experience and learning has been that this form of **inclusion can unlock their potential** too.

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Of Educational Rights and Teaching Challenges: To Include and How to Include

Siddhi Vyas

Effecting inclusion involves an attitude of acceptance. The diversity of faiths, customs, languages, and ethnicities in India places us in professional, social, personal situations where we are presented with opportunities to practice inclusion-- and for acceptance of the differences. In many ways then we have been practicing aspects of inclusion-exclusion in our routines of work, social and personal practices. Given the diversities within our context inclusion as a concept is thus not new to Indian society or to its ancient and/or traditional practices. To note a few examples, the state and society's responsibilities towards those in the community unable to care for themselves was outlined by Kautilya (c.320 BC) in his presentation on *Formation of Villages, Duties of Government Superintendents (Shamasastry, 1956).* Records also indicate the socially inclusive approaches to education observed through *madarsah* education during the reign (1556-1605) of Akbar (Choudhary, 2008). In a related example a beloved historical collection of fables and morals, *Panchatantra,* provides an illustration of attending to differences and adapting teaching to learning needs. A pre-colonial, possibly the first known text on pedagogy, *Panchatantra* relied on dialogue and connecting learning goals to examples from the animal kingdom; it was inspired out of the need to teach 'discourteous' princes (Shastri, 1967, p.2) who were 'unteachable' and 'hostile' to education' (Ryder, 1949 p.12).

In some form or another then, our formal systems have been attempting or applying inclusive approaches. This discussion focuses on aspects of including children with disabilities in regular schools. An intensified policy focus on inclusive education for persons with disabilities commenced following the disability rights movement and the introduction of the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's inclusive education provisions brought its practice more formally into the classrooms and to the teachers' professional routine work and interactions. Recent developments in policy, particularly following the Right to Education Act (2009) have sharpened the focus on education for all in India and have now put inclusive education under greater scrutiny from teachers and researchers. Following the recent legislative measures, practicing inclusive education has now become a question of conscious decision-making, of observing instances where our practices may not have been inclusive.

To those advocating for disability rights, inclusive education offers a sense of encouragement that the existing student abilities and prevailing strengths will be recognized-- the potentials that are overshadowed instead, by a focus on attributes restraining educational and social practices from embracing the children with impairments. For the parents, the promise of inclusive education brings renewed hope of the schools, classrooms and ultimately, the classmates accepting their child. For the teachers, there is likely anxiousness in ensuring the teaching is effective and helps achieve their goals that also meet the legal expectations for the classrooms. For those of us who are connected here due to the recognition of the need to improve schooling or, because of our concerns for education of children with impairments, the inclusive practice offers hope towards addressing the educational inequalities. Inclusive education thus presents opportunities to embrace the groups of students who historically, culturally, or pedagogically have not had the same access to education as the majority may have had.

Implementing the policy's intent involves consciously bringing a shift in our attitude; putting the policy in practice calls for planning purposively to create, foster and practice in an inclusive classroom and school culture. So, are our classrooms ready? What should teacher preparations involve, towards formally addressing diversities in their planning and practices? To address these queries I draw on my own teaching experiences as well as those from more recent work preparing teacher education material for inclusive public classrooms.

Accepting differences, including diversity

As presented earlier, practicing inclusion implicates the quality of acceptance. Expecting and accepting that there are student differences and diverse ways of learning would be among the first steps towards creating an inclusive culture in our classrooms and schools. This is among the most valuable lessons I have held close to me as a teacher, owing in large part to my own early schooling experiences. It is a lesson that my own students would remind me of as well, through my years of work in and with varying classroom settings.

An inclusive approach to teaching calls for sensitivity in planning, in use of language and a recognition of teaching-learning styles to help create a culture that reflects an acceptance of differences - of gender, of faiths and ethnicities, of languages, learning styles and abilities. A consideration that is quite possibly intimidating for a teacher planning for the inclusive classroom. As a teacher and a teacher educator however, I have learned that it is in fact productive to plan for lessons while consciously considering the students' diversities. Rather than focus on and attend individually to diverse needs in my classrooms, over time I came to instinctively plan around the diversities. Teaching a group including students with medical, physical, sensory and cognitive needs became a creative process with my colleagues[1], often a joy when incorporating into my classroom planning and organization the students' attributes, their personalities, strengths, preferences and needs. The understanding that inclusive education for all can help rather than complicate the practice is important. It is also important to recognize the different approaches that may be effectively utilized in making the efforts at inclusivity more successful.

Building on strengths and differences as strategies for inclusive classrooms

We had just not imagined that we could teach all [emphasis added] students in the classroom together this way.[2] (Regular public school teacher, NCERT workshop, January 2014).

We received the above feedback at the end of a workshop focusing on teaching in regular classrooms that may have students with sensory, physical, cognitive and/or multiple impairments in it. Our participants were all regular elementary public school teachers. Although the focus of the ongoing workshop series is on including students with impairments in regular classrooms, my underlying objective when preparing teacher education materials for our public schools has been to help teachers recognize that there is no one approach to reach all students, regardless of the similarities or the diversities of classroom make up. Our related work has also helped reveal that teachers are finding this thinking to be practical and, further validating our efforts, have suggested extended sessions for subsequent workshops on the topic.

"Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history ..." (Mandela, 1995, p. 84).

An understanding about the students, the possible experiences they may or may not have had, and

[1] *Depending on individual student needs, a physical, occupational, speech therapists and/or orientation-mobility instructors need to be consulted to include their therapy goals for the student. Some programs I worked with additionally provided for art, music, and dance therapists. Incorporating their therapy goals in lesson-plans can enrich and ease working for the classroom goals.*

[2] *Translated from Hindi: "humne kabhi yeh socha hee nahi tha ki hum saare bacchhon ko ek saath is tarah se bhee padha sakte hai"*

their backgrounds is crucial in designing and defining a teacher's work with the class. I expand the connotation of the word language in the partial quote[3] utilized above to foreground the importance of recognizing what the students present, the expressions of how they reveal their experiences, their understanding and their present worldviews.

Recognizing the language of their expressions has the potential to help the teacher in each of us understand, reach out and bring into the fold, those in the periphery.

To help the public school teachers make transitions to the expected changes for inclusive education with greater ease, the Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs (DEGSN) at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is developing teacher facilitative material.[4] These include suggestions, tips, ideas and strategies developed through our research and from information collected through a series of workshops[5] organized by the DEGSN involving regular and special education teachers. The ongoing workshops related to the teacher education material engage the teachers in hands-on activities to develop their own illustrations of inclusive approaches by adapting, modifying and planning lessons from the NCERT textbooks. Figure 1 presents a few of the suggestions based on my teaching experiences that we have shared in our work helping the teachers create an inclusive culture.

Figure 1

[3] *Full quote reads: "Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs."*

[4] *Vyas and Julka, in press.*

[5] *In addition to semi-formal interviews the initial information for the teacher education handbook was collected through three workshops on: (i) Need Assessment held in July 2013 at the NCERT campus, New Delhi. Its participants included regular school teachers from public schools and resource teachers (ii) second workshop was held in September 2013 in Bangalore inviting practicing teachers and administrators from different disability areas, special education teachers and educators working in special as well as inclusive settings. (iii) the third workshop was held in October 2013 at the NCERT campus in Delhi, its participants included special teachers working in public as well as private schools, regular school teachers from public schools, and representatives from the Department of Elementary Education (DEE), NCERT.*

A part of an online interview with Bill Nye (1955), an American science educator has become a popular citation; "[e]veryone you will ever meet knows something you don't" (2012). This quote highlights the importance of involving the students in your efforts at inclusivity. Teaching is rewarding if also exhausting work and planning for an inclusive classroom may seem an especially challenging task. As presented earlier, organizing around challenges, incorporating innovative practices, and utilizing resources when specialized services are needed can help make inclusive teaching experiences effective and also enjoyable. In the process, students engaging in learning through the inclusive experience will learn of the similarities and differences amongst themselves; the realization that each one of them is indeed different and therefore special because he or she can contribute to this collaborative process in their own unique ways, would be a significant achievement.

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Exploring Inclusion in Children's Literature

Usha Mukunda

"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."- Graham Greene.

Inclusion in children's literature – Is it a simple story?

The benefits and advantages of reading cannot be reiterated often enough. Against this reality, it is imperative that all children of all persuasions and abilities have access to reading material. However mere access is not enough. There must be access to books of good content, facilitators who can ensure access and who will also provide an open space for children to talk about their observations and responses to books.

Inclusion must be on an equal footing. It is not the inclusion of a lesser with a greater. It is to do with being on par. So it is absolutely essential for all children to read and know about each others' lives, situations and particularities.

When a child reads a book, she relates to it in various ways. The theme and plot catch her fancy, there is strong identification with a character or two, the illustrations strike a chord in her mind and the language seems to mirror her thoughts. At the end of the reading it is highly probable that an unconscious reflective process has begun.

My experience in working with children from both urban and rural backgrounds, reveals that there are universal favourites which appeal across the board. 'Basava and the magic dots' is the story of a village boy living with his mother, on the outskirts of a forest. Their life is simple and austere. Another boy, brought up in an urban society reads this book and immediately feels a strong bond with Basava. The story appeals to him and so does the character. So there are no barriers here.

Another child from a rural background repeatedly returns to read 'Surangini' and shares with me how much she loves the beautiful images and designs as does a child from a very different milieu. 'Chuskit goes to school' is about a wheel- chair bound girl living in Ladakh. She is a cheerful young person and has many friends. Her only regret is that she can't go to school with them. The terrain is not hospitable to her wheelchair. The resolution of the story is unusual because children bring it about. The reader takes in the natural beauty of the landscape depicted and the fact that Chuskit is disabled does not overwhelm the story. I was rather happy to take along this 'inclusive' story to a school for disabled children that I visit once a month. But to my surprise they responded to it as they would to any other good story. They loved the book but there was no special identification with Chuskit.

A child helping another to read at Shraddhanjali, the school at Association for Physically Disabled

Look for the girl who loved 'Surangini!'- Kausani Village library, Uttarakhand

So do we then say that stories and strongly etched characters as well as imaginative art work are far more important than having settings and people who are familiar to the reader? There are many more such examples where a well written book cuts through all barriers and enables young readers from different backgrounds to meet in the appreciation and enjoyment of such a book. However, one cannot

deny that there is a strong case to be made for children's writers and illustrators to be more sensitive and aware about accessibility to every kind of reader. But woe betides the book that sets out to do this as a goal, because then it is doomed from the start! Authors and artists must have the creative freedom to present their work on what rings true to them. All readers relate to the authenticity of that voice.

Are there books with inclusive themes in children's literature in India?

The series that Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, has brought out shows us one such possibility. These are themes which highlight children from less familiar (to us) circumstances and are powerful stories that are disturbing, moving, and raise many questions. One wishes that they were a bit less intense only for the reason that children may not immediately relate to them. After all one strong criterion for a children's book is that it should be a 'darn good tale.' These 'Different Tales' may need the intervention of an adult but they do show us the way.

What are the equalising elements in children's literature?

1. Multiplicity of languages is essential.

With the number of languages thrumming through the states of India, it is laudable that Eklavya has taken the bold step of publishing books, not only in mainstream languages like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu and Chattisgarhi but also in Malwi (spoken in Malwa region of MP), Bundelkhandi (spoken in Bundelkhand region of MP), Gondi, Korku (both tribal languages with huge populations in MP), and very recently in Kunkna. (a tribal language spoken in southern Gujarat) Other publishers like Pratham and Tulika also cover a large number of languages. Their bi-lingual books can be seen as an encouragement to inclusivity. Jyotsna Publications caters to the Marathi readers with good effect. Regional publishers do exist in many states but the quality is not uniform. State Governments would do well to look into this situation and see how to provide support to publishers.

2. Multiplicity of settings, characters and art work.

This is happening very gradually with the advent of writers and illustrators across the country. They are portraying settings, characters and art forms reminiscent of their own childhood so the books ring true. 'The Why-Why girl' by Mahashwetha Devi, an NBT publication, is a unique example.

Girl bonding - A Tibetan student at Paonta Sahib, HP, reading 'The Why-why girl'

3. Contemporise different communities and their cultures. Do not treat them as museum pieces.

Many times inclusive literature seems to be a synonym for 'folk tales from .....' or 'ancient legends from.....'. There is a glorification of that time and age. Stories set in contemporary situations are far more meaningful for a feeling of inclusion. A very good book called 'Eskimo Boy' shows a family looking much like any other except for some distinct aspects and no, these are not about living in igloos and cutting holes to fish!

4. Sense of pride could be evoked without a feeling of stereo-typing.

Children can relate to stories about their culture or gender when there is a sense of pride evoked. In 'Who will be Ningthou' the youngest child of a king in Manipur, a girl, is chosen as the most worthy successor. In 'Malu Bhalu' we admire the bravery and daring of a mother and daughter. In 'Kali and the water snake', no one can deny the boy's skill in catching the snake even though the stereo-typing is unfortunate. All these books were brought out by Tulika Publishers.

A & A Publishers have made a good move in bringing out a series dedicated to the girl child. NBT's 'Etoa Munda won the battle' is an inspiring story of a tribal boy who fights great odds to get an education.

5. Keeping it light!

Children love a story that is enjoyable. So even if the themes are very relevant, the touch has to be light. This is why 'Ju's story' and 'Under the Neem tree'published by Tulika work so well. The themes

Children at a rural school at Shitla, Uttarakhand at the release of a book they created

raise serious issues but the children in the stories carry them lightly. Eklavya's 'I am a cat' is also an excellent example of this where a young girl is playing a game with her mother to get out of the household chores. Through the narrative and the exquisite water colour pictures, the reader can intuit their economic state, notice the tin shed roof, meagre belongings, and the torn and patched clothes. But nowhere does the writer or the character ask for your sympathy. It is pure fun that any child can and does relate to.

6. Different themes.

So far authors and publishers have taken on relatively 'safe' themes. 'Ponni the flower seller' and 'Babu the hotel waiter' by Tara Publishers are a good start, no doubt, but how about 'A day in the life

An early start - The youngest reader at Kausani Village, Uttarakhand

of Lakshmi the Hijra or of a disabled child'? Anveshi has tackled a tough theme in 'The Sackclothman' where a young girl going through the trauma of a family tragedy reaches out to a mentally disturbed adult. It begs the question of what we would have done in a similar situation. In 'Untold school stories', a girl of a lower caste is tormented and punished by the teacher and her classmates.

7. Leave something unsaid for the young reader to think about, have a dialogue with others, and come to an understanding.

'Bhimayana' a graphic novel of the life of B. R. Ambedkar is a good example of this with a true story and imaginative art work. Another is 'Mukund and Riaz', a tale of two friends faced by the onset of partition. The issues here are complex but there is no need to spell out everything. The child needs to feel that there is something more to come. 'The Unboy boy' is another such example.

8. Story and plot which weave in 'different-ness' in a larger plot.

'Kabuliwala' by Tagore can be read like this. There is a strong father-daughter relationship into which the disturbing 'stranger' enters.

9. Ease of access and affordability.

NBT and Pratham Books have made a significant contribution in this area with their book fairs in remote places and their low cost books.

10. Matter of fact. Stating things as they are without a heavy emotional load.

Ruskin Bond's 'Angry River' by Rupa Publications tells the story of a rising river and how it impacts a young girl and her grandparents - a simple and moving tale.

11. Nonfiction.

'Trash – On rag-picker children and recycling', by Tara Publishers and 'Suresh and the Sea' published by Tulika look at young children who are tied to certain lifestyles. In 'Why are you afraid to hold my hand?' a disabled child poses this question to his 'able' counterpart. There is also 'Beti Kare Sawaal' in Hindi by Eklavya which opens up questions for girls on their bodies and changes. A delightful book on 'Some street games of India' by NBT shows the possibility of children of all backgrounds enjoying these simple games.

12. Children transcribing oral stories and creating new ones.

During a recent course on library work with a number of library educators who are taking care of

community libraries in remote locations, one of them shared that learning the language of the children she interacted with was her first priority. After doing this she hoped to translate stories into Pardhi, the local language and in the final phase, get the children to create their own stories. Another group from Maharashtra too explored this idea. An innovative idea for inclusive children's books!

Apart from the publishers mentioned, Centre for Learning Resources, Pune, and Khel Kitaab, Delhi have some inclusive themes in their publications. The Parag Initiative is also doing its bit by funding a good number of children's publishers but it is still a case of too few and too far between.

Discovering the world - A young user at the Varadenahalli Village Library in Karnataka

In conclusion, inclusive literature may be one way to break barriers. But it is important to explore whether children relate to stories about 'themselves' more significantly than they do to a story well told. Otherwise we may be in an unfortunate situation where books contrive to be inclusive but completely fail to reach children's deeper sensibilities.

"Where ignorance is our master, there is no possibility of real peace." – His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

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It has been a 30-year odyssey of fun and learning for **Usha** in her interactions with children and books. On this journey she has developed a keen interest in children's literature which she loves to share with all children and some adults. In the last few years she has been involved with rural and village libraries. She may be contacted at usha.mukunda@gmail.com

Include Me!

Vijaya Mahadevan

The academic session is coming to an end and the students are stressed out preparing for their Board Examinations. I am desperately trying to make the class alive and cheerful. My normal class consists of two students diagnosed with cerebral palsy, one visually impaired student, a non-verbal student with multiple disabilities; two intellectually challenged, two with learning disabilities and three others with normal intelligence, but dropped out of mainstream schools due to economic and other family problems. I am devising a method of enacting a grand finale to our spoken English and effective communication class by asking them to do a project based on their business studies curriculum and present it to the entire class. As I group them, immediately, J asks, "How can M participate madam? He can't talk." Even before I could think of a response, pat comes the reply from T, who is in a wheelchair, defending his non-verbal friend, "But M is very good at downloading information, images and putting in power point presentation. We can then explain the slides." Problem solved in a minute! M flashes his trademark smile, which seems to say, "Thank you for including me".

My volunteer and I wonder, Is this real inclusion? Is it so easy?

Inclusion appears to be a grand and elusive concept. The fact that a single accepted definition has yet to gain popularity reflects its complex and contested nature. Inclusive education looks at both the rights of students, and how education systems can be transformed to respond to diverse groups of learners. The historic Salamanca declaration says, "Ideally inclusive education is the process of addressing and responding to the diverse need of all learners by reducing barriers to and within the learning environment." Mrs. Rukmini Krishnaswami, Director, Spastics Society of Karnataka (SSK) puts it beautifully every time she addresses the teachers and special educators on Inclusive education. She says and I quote, "Behind each classroom door, lies a world of diversity. When students with special needs are also members of a class, the range of diversity increases, their learning needs may be more serious or more compelling, possessing a great challenge to the teacher." In SSK, we are specifically looking for inclusion of out of school children either dropped out or pushed out in the 6-14 age group, infants with special needs and children from socio-economic disadvantaged groups like minorities, tribal and immigrant.

Spastics Society of Karnataka

Although we believe that all students should be participants in the general education process, no programme or placement meets the needs of all students. When we hear the term disability, many people think of physical problems. However, physical, visual and hearing impairments are the least common types of disabilities. Most frequent are learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, behavioural disorders and mental retardation. We believe that inclusion benefits students with and those without disabilities.

Inclusion in a classroom can help teach tolerance, patience and to value diversity thus preparing all students for adult life in an inclusive society.

This is the reason why Spastics Society of Karnataka stands tall like a banyan tree with multiple branches and roots firmly grounded. SSK provides diagnostic and rehabilitation services for children with neuromuscular and developmental disabilities with special focus on cerebral palsy, mental retardation, autism spectrum disorders, multiple disabilities and learning disabilities. SSK's focus is on independence and self- care, communication, life skills training; need based education and above all the confidence to face the world. Even though curriculum based education according to the child's ability and learning styles is taught with supplementary learning materials, enrichment activities like music, art and craft, clay modelling and sports are also provided.

An inclusive education programme catering to the needs of the children from economically disadvantaged groups who are drop outs from the main stream schools is continued thanks to the National Institute of open schooling (NIOS). Many who have passed the secondary and senior

The SSK team

secondary courses under the scheme have been able to pursue graduation in main stream colleges in Bangalore like Christ College, Jyothi Nivas college, Jain University and Good will women's college. The above mentioned colleges provided an opportunity to the multi-disciplinary team from SSK to address the staff and the students regarding the disabilities, thus sensitising the younger generation and also empowering our special students to integrate into the community. One of our special students who is pursuing graduation in communication says,"On the very first day of college, I was really excited. I had entered a new world, a world where students from mainstream schools had gathered to do the course and I am one among them! I am proud to say that the confidence I got from SSK has helped me a lot to reach to this level". Over the years we have seen many brilliant students becoming Brand Ambassadors of disability awareness in our society. Yes, we are trying to maximize the potential of the children with special needs by working constantly, consciously and conscientiously towards '**Inclusiveness'** in all aspects of daily life.

All through the years, at SSK, we have realised that the key to the development of inclusive classroom practices and effective instruction lies in teachers' understandings of the differences. It largely depends on their skills in mediating the curriculum for individual pupils. However, research indicates that many teachers do not feel well prepared for inclusive classes and lack confidence in their own ability to teach children with special needs in inclusive settings. Many teachers are more willing to include children with mild disabilities than students with more severe disabilities because this is less disruptive to their overall goal of teaching the whole class.

The changes that take place as a school moves towards becoming more inclusive also involve overcoming some potential obstacles. These include existing attitudes and values, lack of understanding, lack of necessary skills, and limited resources. Teachers need systematic and intensive training and access to ongoing education. The class room also needs personnel resources like, extra staff to assist in the classroom, adequate curriculum resources and equipment to cater for those with disabilities.

Families know certain aspects of their children better than anyone else and have the greatest vested interest in seeing their children learn, so, the family should be continuously involved with the child's education programme throughout his or her

entire school career. There can be situations where the parents' and the child's wishes are not always compatible. For example, parents may prefer a mainstream class, while students for whom interaction with peers who understand their issues are important, so, may prefer segregated settings. The students may not wish to be the only ones in the school who have a particular condition or difficulty. Conflicts may arise as we attempt to balance these rights. It has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to **diversity.** It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference.

Clear role relationships among professionals, effective use of support staff and meaningful Individual Education Plans (IEPs) procedures for evaluating effectiveness are the order of the day. Using assistive technology as a tool for curriculum access is a relatively recent and rapidly evolving approach to education. The continuous advancements in technology will only help to expand its application in the inclusive classroom.

Lastly, the role of society cannot be undermined when talking about inclusive education. SSK works with communities, corporations and other non-profit organisations to engage with in both the dialogue and process of inclusion. By increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from the cultures, curricula and communities, restructuring the policies and practice in schools and outside so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality will lead to recognising that inclusion in education is a critical aspect of inclusion in society.

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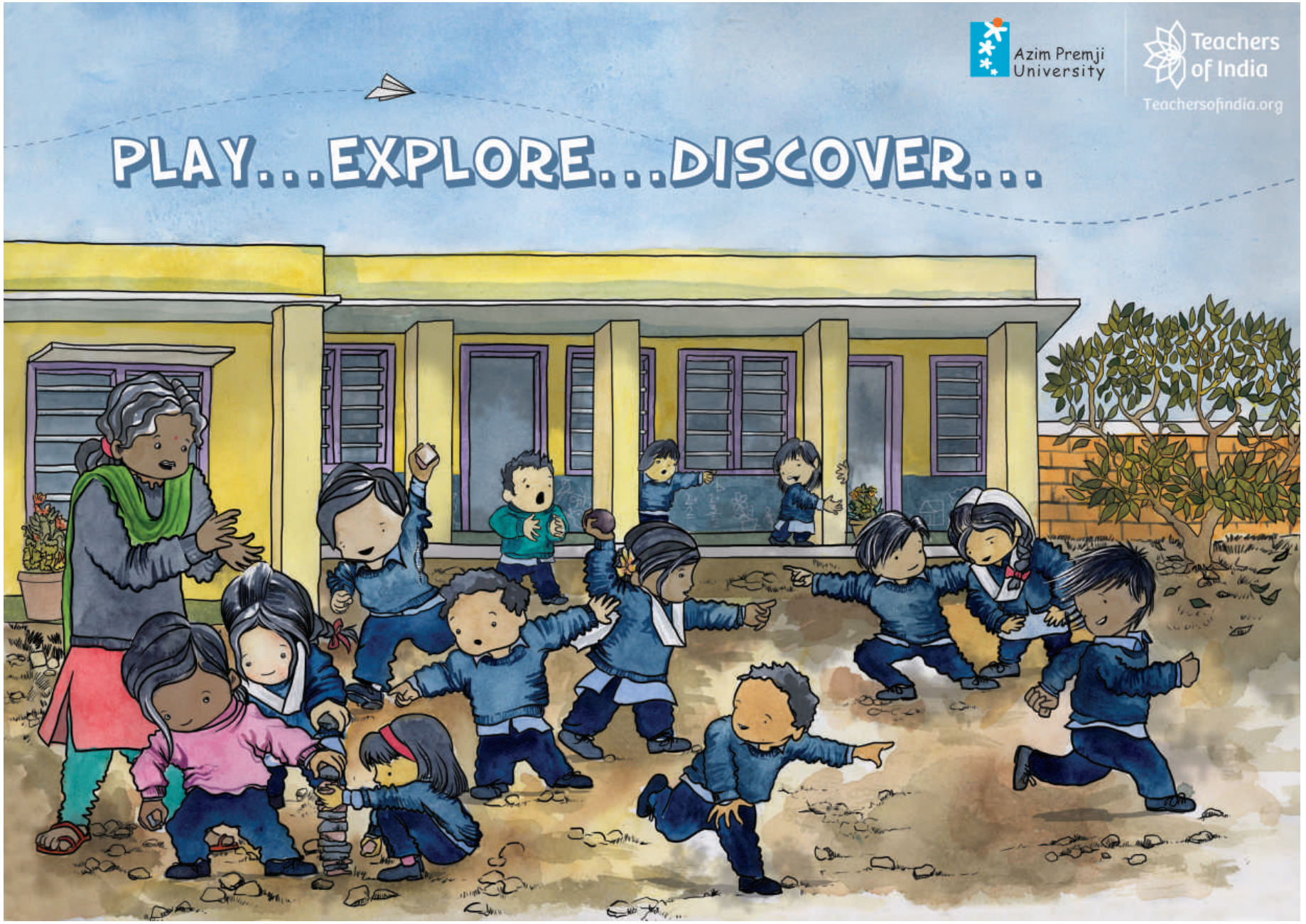
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