



Contextualisation and Educational Intervention for teaching children with special needs in a Mainstream Inclusive Classroom:

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Unity in diversity essentially means “unity without uniformity” and “diversity without fragmentation”. It is based on the notion that diversity enriches human interaction.

India is a vast country with immense diversity. These diversities are an everyday reality in all context of the Indian life. The age-old culture of the country enables a mass consciousness towards acceptance of variations in all walks of life. Hence in our contemporary education system also, the acceptance of diversity in the classroom should come naturally to the education system which includes teacher and the taught. Thus, it does become important to reflect upon what has caused the education system to wean out diversities and become too uniform in its approach to teaching processes and hence learning by the students. Glimpses into the games that children played on a regular bases just a decade or two back, actually revolved around learner centred application-based learning processes. However, many of these games and learning processes have now become confined to the resource rooms or the special education rooms of the school system. Having said the above, it is no way implied that the understanding of neuro-developmental disabilities was better understood by the education system then as to now. However, the concept of differentiated learning and reinforcement of the concepts through different games and other activities which the children were engaged beyond the school hours is visible from the anecdotal records and the oral stories.

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Moving on to understand and contextualise the concept of inclusion or rather a step ahead to state it as justice-based inclusion processes, it becomes important to revisit the terminologies such as equality, equity inclusion, uniformity and justice-based inclusion.

Equality can be defined as the equal distributions of tools, devices, assistance in the teaching-learning processes. The education system is often so inclined that even if it does provide equality in tools, devices, assistance in the teaching-learning processes, it does not cater to the diversity in the learning processes. It is often the system which finds it difficult to incorporate even the very do-able accommodation into itself. National Educational Policy 2020 (NEP2020) has emphasised the need to have learner centred and learner centric education systems and so had many earlier Acts and Policies. Differentiated learning and Universal Design of Learning (UDL) elaborated extensively and is applicable not only for segregated learning-teaching processes of children with disabilities but also for mainstream inclusive classrooms and education systems.

For example, there is no point in providing the best and in large quantity textbooks to a child with blindness. These books need to be in the form the individual with blindness can extract information effectively from, namely either in audio form or in braille. However, if the system does not permit audio-recording of classroom teaching or even a simple thing as providing a larger desk for the child to spread out the braille books in the mainstream classroom, or a well mentored buddy system then how will the child benefit with being provided with more and high-quality printed textbooks? Secondly, does the general teacher have to be an expert braille reader?? Not necessarily if the braille book can have indicators in print. Hand written for the general teacher as also peer-support system in place.

It needs to be noted that many of the adaptations which are applicable for learners with blindness are also very effective for learners with specific learning disabilities such as audio-books, speech to text devices and so on. Similarly in the case of a child with neuro-diversity such as specific learning disability which may be dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and so on, the schools where teachers and school administrators and other have sufficient insight into the diversity in the brain functioning of such learners, become aware that the traditional method of repetition of classroom teaching and instructions only in a particular may not help

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such children learn and be able to project their abilities effectively. Majority of these children are ‘picture-readers’ rather than sequential readers. So, if we take the examples of teaching spellings, sensitised teachers and education systems are aware that their brain finds it difficult to remember that this will follow this and then this, ie sequential. However, if the information is provided in activity form, experiential learning form, converted into narratives/ story format, concretise formats and o on, they learn better and show amazing results. However, often our education system emphasis that the spelling needs to be correct rather than the understanding of the content or the system does not give adequate time for concept teaching and tends to focus on rote learning and teaching – which may show faster results but retention and application of that information to new concepts may be limited. When the system changes to provide high level in-service programmes for teachers, principals, school managers, non-teaching staff, the system is moving towards equal access as per special need of each learner. When the system straightens up and learns and develops the skills of using learning entered pedagogy, it provides equal opportunity for each learner to excel to the best of their potentials and interests. So, in order to have justice-based inclusion in the mainstream education system, the emphasis has to be of the system to re-orient itself in order to cater to all diversities simultaneously.

Before we move any further, it is imperative that we look at what does mainstream imply in the education system. The two terms mainstreaming and inclusion are often used terms in education and special education. Although they are often used interchangeably, however they do not actually mean the same thing and have emerged from historically different movements. Mainstreaming in the case of disability studies refers to having all children in the same regular school, which includes all children from a particular area and so it includes the children with special needs as well from that area and all of them going to the same school and sitting in the same classes to study. However, a mainstream school which admits students with special needs may not be an inclusive school, if it does not or is not able to engage all the children in learning in the way that child learns best and also cater to the needs of that child to the best possible way.

So, a mainstream inclusive school in the case of disability studies is one where all children go to study and the children with special needs are studying in the regular classroom and their

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particular needs are understood and included as naturally as possible into the learning-teaching processes.

A team of specialist special educator, psychologist, counsellor, speech therapists and physical therapists and so on support the regular teacher on how to help the child with special needs in their classroom. The teacher is advised on how to handle technologies and equipment which assist child with special needs along with other children. Often it becomes a win-win situation wherein the non-disability students also benefit.

The latest Acts and Policies encourage “mainstreaming” and “inclusion” as mandatory processes in schools, and they cannot any longer be only treated as a courtesy offered schools. Mainstreaming requires that schools provide additional support to children with disabilities, such as specialized instruction, assistive technology, and accommodations. Normal schools may not have the resources or expertise to provide this level of support.

The ideas of equity and justice-based inclusion processes have been profounding effected by control of curricula, emphasis on efficiency, standardized performance measures and outcome in schools, increased surveillance and so on. (Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010).

The holistic development of a child includes three major areas namely cognitive development, affective development and psycho-social development. Amer, A. (2006). A glimpse into the school curriculum indicates the major emphasis upon the cognitive aspects of learning. The education system tends to emphasis more on the left-brain functions which means that more emphasis is on logical thinking, facts, sequencing of content, language usage, thinking in words, analysis of content and so on. While the individuals who tend to be inclined more towards the usage of the right brain function are often not given enough space in the education system. The right brain is better at creativity, imagination, holistic thinking, intuition, rhythm, non-verbal, feelings, visualisation tune of sounds and tend to day dream more too. NEP2020 has emphasised that the education system needs to be learner centered and which means that the learning-teaching processes needs to be manoeuvred towards how every learner learns best and not only how the teacher teaches best. The concept of Universal Design of Learning fits in wonderfully into the NEP2020’s emphasis on inclusive mainstream education and learner centered education processes. This is what enables each and every child

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with special needs to become a learning inclusive member of the education system. The Universal design of Learning (UDL), in a layman's language focuses upon the three networks namely the affective, the recognition and strategic. The affective network works on engaging the learners and stimulating as well as motivating them to want to learn or in other words get engaged into the need and want to learn. Next the content needs to be presented in the classroom or any learning spaces so that it is represented in as many different ways as possible. So the same subject content needs to be represented the different learning styles and should reach the learner through the different senses. This will enable all learners to recognise the knowledge in the best way for them. Finally, each and every learner should have space to

express the leaning in the best way they can act upon and express which would mean writing for some, drawing for another, debate for another, dance or drama for still another learner and so on. So in order to be able to use UDL in an mainstream inclusive classroom, the concept of multiple intelligence and multiple learning styles need to be understood and its application skills be developed in the teachers. It is not only the skills which are required in the teachers, it is also the awareness and acceptance of diverse ways of instructions which is essential for an inclusive classroom do be understood by the school administrators and the school management system. For UDL to be successfully implemented in the classroom which have all types of learners with special needs along with the so called 'normal' learners an indepth ability and skills to use multiple learning- teaching styles, multi-modal learning (VAKT senses - Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetics, Tactile), learner centered infrastructures such as sitting arrangements and pedagogy is essential if we want Universal design of learning to be implemented in the classrooms of the regular schools with learners with special needs. So, we can end with the quote:

If a child can't learn the way we teach,
Maybe we should teach the way they learn.

Ignacio Estrad

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