INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE

Dr. Supreet Kaur
Associate Professor in Education, USOL,
Panjab University, Chandigarh, INDIA.

Abstract: Education is one of the significant factors instrumental to the development of a country. Inclusive Education is a new approach towards educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It brings all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. This paper aims to focus on that pedagogy is pivotal for sustaining an inclusive teaching and learning environment.

Key words: Teaching, learning, inclusive education

I. Introduction

Education is the process of developing the capacities and potentialities of the individual, so as to prepare that individual to be successful in society. The purpose of education is to make sure that students of all abilities gain access to information, knowledge and skills which will prepare them to live their lives fruitfully by contributing both to their communities and also to their work places. Thus, the main purpose of education becomes increasingly challenging as more and more schools begin to accommodate students with different abilities and backgrounds in the same teaching-learning setup.

But as one strives to meet the challenge of inclusive education through the Education for All, there are many concepts that are related to the area of inclusive education required to be studied, analyzed and understood to come to a clearer understanding of the concept of inclusive education itself. Inclusive education specifically focuses on inclusion in education and educational institutions. Thus, the most fundamental concerns in education are the quest for excellence in teaching and the intensive effort to offer equal opportunities for all learners. Inclusive pedagogy is defined as an approach intended to promote a culture of accommodating all and ensuring practice based on the use of diverse teaching strategies (Corbett, 2001).

According to NCFTE 2009 Inclusive education refers to a philosophical position as well as an arrangement of institutional facilities and processes. This is to ensure access to and conditions of success in education for everybody, including those in the margins, either with learning difficulties because of physical or mental disabilities or because of their social position.

Policies and laws of our country has enabled inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds besides children with disabilities to be enrolled in regular schools. It is not enough if we just enroll all children in schools. The Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPD Act) mandates inclusive education and stipulates that children with disabilities be admitted in all educational institutes without discrimination and provided with an environment that maximizes academic and social development with the goal of full inclusion. As a moral obligation to the profession of teaching, we need to ensure that all of them learn meaningfully besides implementation of the law till school level.

II. Diversities and Individual Differences

India is a country of huge diversity and now with a population that is more and more mobile the students in our classroom will be diverse in many ways. Diverse not just in socio economic background but diverse in their learning style also. And while it is true that fostering diversity is an idea which is consistent with some of our most enduring national ideals, such as respect for the right of each individual to pursue life in their own fashion, promoting these ideals in the classroom can often prove very difficult. The difficulties which must be overcome stem from several sources:

- A basic lack of knowledge of the diverse people and the lifestyles.
- The prejudices, many of which are not acknowledged.
- Deep seated feelings of guilt, anger, frustration which are often stirred by the discussion of the diversity issue.

A successful pedagogy must start with an awareness of these difficulties and some fundamental strategies for overcoming them. Diversity in the classroom takes multiple forms. We often think of diversity in
demographic or group terms, such as age, class, culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. But the most common involves individual difference: in background, levels of preparation, learning styles, interests, and abilities. To be effective teachers it is important to understand how individual children take in and process information. Not all children learn the same way. In a class of diverse students there are also individual differences amongst the children with disabilities. Developing an inclusive curriculum is a transformative process for the instructor and the students. It entails a paradigm shift in which basic assumptions are examined and changed. Thus, undertaking the project requires desire, curiosity, willingness to travel into unknown pedagogical terrain, and patience with oneself and with one’s students. In an inclusive education system the aim is not to “fix” the child to fit in. It is more about adapting the educational environment so that the system is more supportive and responsive to a diverse group of learners. Inclusive education embraces and celebrates diverse groups and individuals.

The inclusive classroom of today requires careful and comprehensive planning to be able to address the needs of all the learners in class. The inclusive classroom of today requires careful and comprehensive planning to be able to address the needs of all the learners in class and at the same time provide epistemological access to all. The concept of inclusion is aimed at maximising access for all learners in the mainstream classroom. It should not be seen as devising modifications to accommodate learners with disabilities. It should rather form an integral part of instructional planning for the whole class. It is based on the following nine principles (Scott, McGuire & Foley, 2003)

1. Equitable use: Teaching is designed in such a way that it is useful and accessible to all learners.
2. Flexibility: Teaching is designed to accommodate a wide range of individual abilities.
3. Simple and intuitive: The teaching process is characterised by a straightforward and predictable design.
4. Perceptible information: Teaching is designed in such a way that all learners have access, regardless, for example, of sensory ability.
5. Tolerance for error: Instruction anticipates variations in individual learners’ learning rate and prerequisite skills. Mistakes are seen as an opportunity to optimise individual learning.
6. Low physical effort: Instruction is designed to minimise non-essential physical effort in order to allow maximum attention to learning, for example using a computer (or other assistive devices) if writing is a barrier.
7. Size and space for approach and use: Instruction is designed to allow learners to participate regardless of body size, posture, mobility or communication needs. This would refer to seating arrangements to assist learners with hearing impairments or attention difficulties to assure that they can see and face speakers during class.
8. A community of learners: The learning environment promotes interaction and communication among learners and between learners and staff.
9. Instructional climate: This is perhaps the most important principle, as it is about creating a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes respect for and a celebration of diversity.

III. Changing Roles of Teachers

In traditional education settings the teacher has a clear role as he/she provides information to the children. When implementing a more child-centred approach in the classroom, the role of the teacher will change. The teacher does not have a fixed role anymore, but adapts to the situation. Teachers use different teaching approaches to interact with learners. The choice of a particular teaching approach or strategy is guided by the nature of the learning material, type of learners, and the ability of the teacher to manage the process.

Roles for teachers in child-centred classes include
- Facilitator: providing appropriate learning opportunities and encouraging children to contribute ideas in a constructive manner.
- Manager: planning and guiding discussions to ensure all children can contribute.
- Observer: observing children as they work alone, in groups and as they play. This will help to understand them better and create better learning activities.
- Learner: reflecting on the lessons and ways to make them more meaningful in the future.

Various Strategies in Pedagogy of Inclusion include
1. Educators Ask Themselves Questions about Goals, Learning Needs and Teaching Methods
2. Active Learning and Use of a Variety of Teaching Methods
3. Offer Choices as to How Students Can Demonstrate their Understanding of the Content (Evaluation)

4. Provide Accessible Written or Online Materials in PDF, MS Word, PowerPoint and Excel

Strategies to develop Inclusive cultures in Schools
- Translate national inclusive education policies into school-based policies. These school-based policies should include a commitment to non-discrimination and inclusion, the development of a child-centred school framework, school self-assessments and school development plans.
- Ensure that such policies are reflected in all aspects of the life of the school: classroom teaching and relationships, school and board meetings, teacher supervision, school trips, playground behaviour, budgetary allocations and any interface with the local community or wider public.
• Engage teacher associations, school boards, parent-teacher associations, and other functioning school support groups with programmes to increase their understanding and knowledge of disability.
• End segregation within schools by ensuring a commitment to inclusive classroom teaching.
• Developing municipal policies for inclusive classroom environments, involving schools, teachers, municipal officials, school administrators, parents and children, as well as other stakeholders.
• Provision of support within mainstream classes to children with disabilities.
• Monitoring schools on a regular basis to ensure that segregation is not taking place either formally or informally. Monitoring should involve parents of children with disabilities in order that systems are transparent and accountable to them and their children.

IV. Teacher Trainers

Many teachers express the need to experience and practice an inclusive, child-centred pedagogy. However, most of the pre-service teacher training courses are lecture-based, focusing on knowledge rather than on skills, values and attitudes. They offer little or no opportunity for students to practice skills in real schools. Many teacher trainers themselves have little experience with innovative teaching methods or teaching in inclusive settings. It is difficult for them to fully prepare student teachers to work in inclusive schools. Teacher trainers need to be supported to develop self-critical skills to reflect upon their own beliefs, values, culture and attitudes towards inclusion and disability. They should become models for inclusive teaching in their own lessons. Self-reflection is important for both teacher trainers and students. What teachers learn in (theoretical) training courses from experts is very often not implemented in practice, unless teachers have the skills to reflect deeper on the content to develop a wider understanding about the concepts and how to relate them to their specific context.

V. Teaching and Learning in Inclusive Settings

Two ways of conceptualizing the educational needs of children with disabilities are

• The individual view places the ‘problem’ inside the child with disabilities, which leads to labelling the child as being ‘special’. This is problematic for a number of reasons:
  - labelling lowers the teacher’s expectations towards children with disabilities;
  - teachers may feel as if they are not responsible or capable of teaching children with disabilities;
  - opportunities are missed to make changes in the teaching style, class and school environment which would benefit all children.
• The curriculum view problematizes the educational system instead of the child with disabilities. It is based on the assumption that all children may experience difficulties at school and that these difficulties point to ways in which teaching and learning can be improved for all children.
• Not all children with disabilities share the same learning needs and it is not possible to identify special teaching strategies for children with disabilities that are significantly different from general teaching strategies.
• Since there are no specific teaching strategies for children with disabilities, inclusive teachers use and adapt a child-centred pedagogy to meet the needs of all children.

Important elements in Inclusive Pedagogy include

✓ facilitating multiple pathways to learning; encouraging cooperative learning;
✓ creating meaningful learning opportunities;
✓ developing attractive and flexible learning settings;
✓ and rethinking assessment strategies and changing roles of teachers.

VI. Conclusion

Inclusive education is a strategy to provide quality education for all learners through meaningful access to education. The prospect for educators to reflect on their teaching practices, and to innovate by integrating inclusive strategies and methods into the planning, delivery and evaluation activities within the teaching and learning dynamic, is fundamental in providing the right learning experience to students. All students are empowered to learn and achieve, experiencing high quality teaching practice and the best conditions for learning which equip them with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for lifelong learning.

References