

Capacity Building of Teachers for Inclusive Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. While inclusive education has been implemented successfully in many countries, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal. There are three essential components of Capacity building in inclusive education. First is, increasing awareness and attitudinal change through advocacy, second; creating future trained professionals through pre service training and third; build on existing human resources. An Inclusive Teacher Preparation Model provides a framework for developing and implementing a teacher education program that will prepare teachers to teach in inclusive educational settings. There are two major dimensions of the model. One deals with the outcomes of the model and the other focuses on specific program components. Three major components constitute the supports for this model. The first, Collaborative Teaching, the second component involves Techniques and Strategies; teachers who will be expected to teach in diverse settings must have the instructional tools to do so successfully. The third component of an inclusive teacher preparation model relates to Collaborative Experiences. The two previous components apply primarily to the classroom. The third component relates to the field based experiences of the prospective teachers. Assistive technology (AT) is also an important tool that helps students with disabilities do things more quickly, easily or independently. The success of inclusive education in any context depends upon many factors. Teachers themselves are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school environment. Hence, efforts must be continued to chase the dreams of capacity building of our teachers for inclusive education.

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Capacity Building, Collaborative Teaching, Assistive Technology

I. Introduction

Inclusive education has been internationally recognized as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice and quality education for all children, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream education for reasons of disability, ethnicity, gender or other characteristics. While inclusive education has been implemented successfully in many countries, other countries are still in the process of achieving this goal.

There have been efforts internationally to include children with disabilities in the educational mainstream. Giffard Lindsay (2007) suggests that 'inclusive education/ mainstreaming is the key policy objective for education of children and young people with disabilities'. Inclusive education entails 'increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools' (Booth and Ainscow, 1998). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education paved the way for inclusive education. It upheld the aim of 'education for all' by suggesting some foundational changes in programmes and

policies of nations. The Statement solicits governments to give the highest priority to making education systems inclusive and adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy. It emphasizes that every child has a basic right to education and every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.

The Salamanca Statement maintains that 'inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and the enjoyment and exercise of human rights' (quoted in CSIE 1997). Thus we see inclusive education as largely emanating from the human rights perspective which upholds that variations in human characteristics associated with disability, whether in cognitive, sensory, or motor ability, as inherent to the human condition and such conditions do not limit human potential. The idea of children having rights independently of the adults around them is a relatively new concept of the past century and a common theme in early legislation was that children were seen as passive recipients, to be 'seen but not heard' (Munro 2001). The adoption of Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC) in 1989 and the World Summit for Children in 1990 were promising enactments and it appeared that rights of children were seriously being considered by the governments and international community (International Save the Children Alliance 2001).

The rights of the children were envisaged at the CRC and reaffirmed through the recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006). The CRC remains a landmark document which comprehensively covers civil and political, social, economic and cultural rights of children. It takes due consideration of the survival, development, protection and participation needs of children. India ratified the convention in December 1992, thereby committing itself to protect and promote rights of all its children. Both the conventions clearly uphold the importance of education of all children with disabilities and maintain that they must not be excluded from the general educational system. Though the member nations have ratified the convention there are reported good practices and violations all over the world. 'Disability' in children renders them even more vulnerable to violation of their rights. Children with disabilities have universally suffered discrimination, violence and abuse, poverty, exclusion and institutionalization (International Save the Children Alliance 2001).

II. Persons With Disability and Their Education

Persons with disabilities form the world's largest minority group. Around 10% of the total world's population, or roughly 650 million people, live with some disability. And the situation is worse in the so called developing countries, who according to UNDP, house 80% of persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2010). There is a vicious circle or two-way link between disability and poverty; poor people are more at risk of acquiring a disability because of lack of access to good nutrition, health care, sanitation, as well as safe living and working conditions. Once this occurs, they face barriers to education, employment, and public services that pushes them further into poverty. Total disabled population – is 2.1% of total population, Visual --48.5% Movement-- 27.9% Mental-- 10.3% Speech-- 7.5% Hearing-- 5.7%

III. Need for Inclusion in Education

According to UNESCO (1994), regular schools with an inclusive orientation are most effective in combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. Research studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of inclusion in education practice, the positive effects on the educational outcomes of children with disabilities in inclusive settings (Katz & Miranda, 2002), and the lack of any significant difference in the development of children with special needs in inclusive and special settings (Lal, 2005). The foreword of UNICEF (2003), focussed on inclusive education in India, estimates that “70% of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them”.

IV. Objectives of Capacity Building in Inclusive Education

Capacity building of prospective and in-service teachers is required to enable them :

- To understand the concept and philosophy behind inclusive education.
- To make them understand and committed towards the global and national commitments towards education of children with diverse needs.
- To enable them in creating conducive and healthy teaching learning environment in inclusive schools.
- To enable them to identify and utilize existing resources for promoting inclusive practices.

V. Essential Components of Capacity Building in Inclusive Education

There are three essential components of Capacity building in inclusive education .First is, increasing awareness & attitudinal change through advocacy ,second creating future trained professionals through pre service training and third build on existing human resource or inservice training.

VI. Attitudinal Changes and Awareness Raising

For inclusive education to succeed, it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion. They must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children. Even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners. Obtaining such support involves behavior and attitudinal change which is not a quick or easy process. There are a number of ways to accomplish such change for examples activities and strategies that have been used successfully in the CRS Vietnam program such as organizing training workshops for educators and key community members on general inclusive education techniques.

VII. Pre-Service Training Programs

In order to build human resources in the field of education, training must be done both at the pre-service and in-service levels. Pre-service training refers to training individuals before they become teachers. This includes training at teacher training colleges and universities at both the national and provincial levels. Ideally, inclusive education should be a compulsory subject for all teacher candidates and an integral part of teacher training curricula. Fundamental knowledge and skills of inclusive education, such as understanding needs and abilities of children with special needs and pedagogical skills such as instructional accommodation and

activity differentiation, should be provided widely to teacher candidates. Countries with strong track records of implementing inclusive education, such as the United States and Australia, have adopted this model for a long-time. As a long term goal, countries should work towards promoting inclusive education as a compulsory subject in pre-service training programs . Nation wide efforts have been initiated in this direction in our country also. . In C C S University , Meerut “Creating An Inclusive School” ,a new course has been introduced in B. Ed. 2nd year with this specific purpose.

VII. In-Service Training Programs

In-service training includes professional development for teachers who are already working in the classroom. In addition to developing the skills of professionals before entering the workforce, it is essential that teachers already teaching be provided skills and techniques for inclusive education. Teachers in many countries are required to upgrade their professional skills on an annual or regular basis to enhance their teaching performance. In-service training programs offer a particularly effective strategy to improve the quality of an entire educational system for all children regardless of their needs. Inclusive education methods are child-centered, employing active and participative learning techniques that improve teachers’ capacity to teach children both with and without disabilities. Collaborative and participative techniques not only enhance learning outcomes, but also reduce prejudice and discrimination among children.

VIII. An Inclusive Teacher Preparation Model

This model provides a framework for developing and implementing a teacher education program that will prepare teachers to teach in inclusive educational settings. There are two major dimensions of the model. One deals with the outcomes of the model and the other focuses on specific program components To be effective an inclusive teacher preparation program must instill in the pre service teacher an understanding and appreciation of diversity. In general, most educators, and that includes teacher educators, have not had a great deal of experience in teaching students with diverse needs and abilities. That is because when we went to school, and when many of us taught in the public schools, these students were segregated from the general education setting. Many individuals coming into pre service training programs have had limited experiences with special needs children. Exposing pre service teacher candidates early and often to situations involving individuals who are uniquely abled and who have different learning styles and needs can assist with this. Teacher trainers also need to mirror inclusive practices and accommodate for diversity in their classrooms. Most teachers have a narrow range of diversity with which they feel comfortable. Expanding that comfort level is essential if teachers are to be successful in teaching to the wide range of diverse abilities present in today’s classrooms.

IX. Components of an Inclusive Teacher Preparation Program

Three major components constitute the supports for this model. The first, Collaborative Teaching, concerns the instructional approach used in the classroom. If we want to prepare teachers to teach collaboratively we must utilize that model in our pre - service classes. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished. Teacher educators can co-teach classes, modeling for their students collaborative teaching skills. This can be done with general and special education faculty, as well as with faculty from other

disciplines outside of education. Collaborative planning for classes and collaborative evaluation of students can also be used as a means of demonstrating how such practices can be done effectively. Such approaches as collaborative learning arrangements and activities requiring students to develop and practice group process skills can also be utilized in the classrooms. Finally, college teachers should integrate curriculum objectives as well as instructional activities across classes and across disciplines.

The second component involves Techniques and Strategies. Teachers who will be expected to teach in diverse settings must have the instructional tools to do so successfully. Several researchers (Schumm and Vaughn, 1995) have noted the lack of professional training in inclusive techniques and practices for general and special education teachers. A tremendous amount of money is spent on inservice training to give teachers instructional skills to teach students with diverse needs. These resources could be directed elsewhere if teachers could emerge from their preservice training already possessing those skills.

Preservice Preparation Should Address Appropriate Accommodations in Curriculum, Instructional activities and evaluation procedures, the modification of materials, and the effective identification, development and utilization of resources. In addition, the preservice program should prepare teachers to use various types of instructional arrangements such as multi-level teaching, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, cooperative learning and remedial help etc.

The third component of an inclusive teacher preparation model relates to Collaborative Experiences. The two previous components apply primarily to the classroom. This component relates to the field based experiences of the prospective teacher. Some prior preparation can be given in the classroom through simulation and role-playing. But, beyond that, the prospective teacher should be given the opportunity to observe and work in collaborative, inclusive situations. This requires that the pre service preparation include multiple opportunities for the prospective teacher to observe and work in actual classrooms where inclusive practices are being implemented. More than this, pre service teachers should also participate in other activities in the school that promote inclusive practices. This includes collaborative planning and problem solving activities, as well as curriculum adaptations and modifications.

If colleges and universities are to prepare teachers to teach in inclusive settings, they must mirror inclusive practices in their teacher preparation programs. That is not easy to do because higher education has traditionally been very discipline-driven and inflexible in its approach to teaching. Most college professors enjoy a great deal of autonomy and are not used to teaching collaboratively or accommodating for students with differences. In addition, the environment of the university, being very competitive, does not lend itself well to collaborative and inclusive practices. Project PRIME, at Abilene Christian University, is an attempt to prepare teachers for inclusive educational settings. Funded by the Texas State Board for Educator Certification, this project incorporates the components of an inclusive teacher preparation program described above. Project PRIME (Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention for Inclusive Multicultural Education) has the following features:

1. Instruction in the components of collaborative teaching;
2. Instruction in teaching strategies for inclusive settings;
3. Practicum experiences in inclusive settings;
4. Modeling of collaborative teaching by university professors;

5. Collaboration with practicing teachers regarding needed skills and experiences;
6. Utilization of experts and specialists on inclusive practices via distance learning;
7. The development of web-based courses;
8. The development of a support network for new teachers in inclusive settings.

In its first year, Project PRIME is seeking to demonstrating the effectiveness and value of preparing teachers for collaborative, inclusive educational settings.

X. Concept of Assistive Technology

Assistive Technology (AT) is any tool that helps students with disabilities do things more quickly, easily or independently. It can be elaborative and expensive or simple and low-cost. Assistive technology services are supports for using assistive technology devices, such as assistive technology evaluations, equipment maintenance, technical assistance, demonstration or training. For students with disabilities that interfere with their communication, learning, social relationships or active participation, assistive technology supports their participation in learning experiences in the least restrictive environment. Assistive technology can be the lifeline that increases a student's opportunities for education, social interactions, and meaningful employment. Technology helps students with disabilities on many different levels. It can help them accomplish tasks like Master grade-level content. Technology presents the material in different forms (visually, auditorially, etc.) It can enable students with learning disabilities or autism to do such things as develop a concept map for a research paper and write using grade-level vocabulary or words they otherwise wouldn't use without a computer due to poor spelling skills. The computer either reads the text digitally or presents it at a lower grade level for students with reading disabilities or visual impairments. It may help the disabled master educational concepts that would otherwise have been beyond their reach. Students can experience abstract concepts such as the growth of a flower through 3-D simulations.

IX. Conclusion

The success of inclusive education in any context depends upon many factors. Teachers themselves are an essential component to ensure the quality of students' inclusion in the school environment. Teachers have direct interaction with students and play a critical role in determining students' experiences in the classroom on a daily basis. Special attention must be paid to ensure that classroom teachers have the skills and support needed to provide quality education to children with diverse learning needs. This requires the collaboration of classroom teachers, key teachers, school principals, education officers and policy makers.

Preparing teachers with essential knowledge and skills for inclusive education also requires the commitment of all teachers. When desired policies are not yet in place in a country, these teachers should explore different and alternative approaches to achieve the ultimate goal of providing quality education for all children. Preparing teachers does not simply mean providing prospective teachers with inclusive education skills; it is important to provide training and support for existing teachers as well. Building the capacity for inclusive education must include awareness raising activities as well as integrated pre-service and in-service teacher training programs to ensure that teachers are aware, ready and willing to bring inclusive education into action. Preparing teachers at the pre service level to teach in inclusive settings is essential if

our schools are to truly teach all students in inclusive, collaborative, and diverse settings. To accomplish that we must start designing and building an atmosphere of collaboration and inclusiveness at the pre service level, as well as practices that demonstrate to prospective teachers the possibilities and promise of an inclusive world. Hence, efforts must be continued to chase the dreams of capacity building of our teachers for inclusive education.

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