

## **Strategies for Reinclusion**

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Education is believed to be a life-long process as it is said that it begins with the birth of a child and continues till the death i.e. the process of education is called “from cradle to grave”. Man began to receive education ever since the dawn of civilization. The education was not a barrier for so called person with disabilities particularly to the blind and the visually impaired children until the system of reading and writing came in to existence. The education used to be imparted through the word of mouth in the pre-writing age. The blindness or visual impairment was, therefore, no barrier. Education is a complex and delicate means by which a child is helped to develop in to a complete human being capable of handling different situation in his environment effectively and successfully in such a way that he-she becomes productive and contributing member of his-her society. Education was imparted in all societies and in all times but its goals and functions were different in different countries in times. For instance, in roman period the purpose of education was to prepare warriors where in the period of Platoes, the purpose of education was to help children to develop intellectually. Since, in the ancient times those having concern for persons with disabilities, particularly blind persons, began to think as to how these persons can be made contributing members of the society. This led to the immergence of the notion that due to blindness a person has some special needs in learning and education As a result of the development of this thinking, the sporadic efforts began to be made to give some form of education to children with blindness in exclusive environment. Gradually the culture of segregated education came in to being. Later in 19<sup>th</sup> century people began to realize that the blind children can be given education in regular schools. Several experiments to study effective implementation of this thinking were made.

With the spread of exclusive education system, due to many reasons such as lack of resources etc the number of disabled people’s participation began to decrease and the situation came where hardly any disabled person used to take part in any activity.

Inclusive education may be a recent concept, but it is an accepted approach in general education in the Indian context. In a general classroom in India, children of different IQ (Intelligence Quotient) levels study together. A classroom teacher usually targets the average learner in his/her teaching, but is also exposed to situations of handling slow learners as well as academically, advanced learners. Therefore, inclusive education on the basis of cognitive abilities is already in vogue in general education. General classroom teachers apply this method of teaching without labelling it an 'inclusive education'. In special education literature children at the two extremes of cognitive abilities are classified as 'mentally retarded' and 'gifted children Groups but in fact they are 'slow learners' and not mentally retarded, an 'academically advanced learners' but not gifted children. These children are certainly different from 'average learners' but they are taught by general classroom teachers only. Therefore, inclusion in this category is already taking place. With this philosophic background, inclusion of sensorily impaired such as the blind and deaf can also be made in the general school system provided there is will, determination and right approach and good intention behind all the efforts of planning and implementing any education programme for persons with disabilities particularly the blind and the visually impaired children. The major similarity between non-disable children and disabled children such as visually impaired children and hearing impaired children is their cognitive abilities remain intact. This similarity is a very supportive factor for these children to study along with non-disabled children in inclusive education. With the acceptance of these facts, the general educational system is acknowledging the fact that education of all types of children including that of children with disabilities should come under the mainstream. In special school concept, the special education component is APART from the general education system, whereas in integrated approach, it is A PART of the general education. Inclusive education goes one step further. In this approach, the special education is an INTEGRAL PART of the general education system.

One has to go long back to trace the history of special education for the children with disabilities. According to the historical documents France played a pioneering role in the area of special education. It was in Paris that Valentine Huay started a School for the Blind in 1785 and Father De L'epée developed an early version of finger spelling for the deaf. Jean Marc Gaspard Itard's case study of 'The Wild Boy of Aveyron' is a pioneering work in the field of education of the mentally retarded. Along with other parts of the world, India too, witnessed the emergence of special schools for people with disabilities. The first school for the deaf was set up in Bombay in 1884 and the first school for the blind at Amritsar in 1887. There was rapid expansion in the number of such institutions. Today, there are more than 3200 special schools throughout India. However, these special schools have certain disadvantages which became evident as the number of these schools increased. These institutions reached out to a very limited number of children, largely urban and they were not cost effective. But most important of all, these

special schools segregated CWSN from the mainstream, thus developing a specific disability culture.

India has witnessed inclusion of children with disabilities since the Vedic age. Inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream education system is not a new concept in India. The philosophy of inclusive education has been in existence in the Indian society definitely before 1000 B.C. "*Vasudevo Kutumbakam*" - Universal brotherhood is an age-old concept in Indian society. In ancient India the persons with disabilities were given education in the communities in which they lived. Education was given in the mainstream school along with the non-handicapped peers. Individualized instructions were given based on the individual child's needs and age. Indian sub-continent had a joint family system and according to this system the head of the family was responsible to look after all the needs of all the members of the family. The disabled persons in this system were no exception. The disabled persons used to participate in all activities with support or independently in whatever way they could. Hence the disabled were included in all activities all their needs were met like other non-disabled persons regardless of religion or cast. All religions used to preach compassion and the followers of all the religions gave all support that any able or disabled person needed for his survival in a meaningful way. The influence of western culture where disabled were segregated in the name of special needs resulting from their disabling conditions began to overshadow the Indian culture as a result of which the disabled people began to be excluded. Emergence of special schools and disability culture has isolated children with disabilities from the mainstream education system in past centuries. But individual efforts to place blind children in regular schools continued during this period also as in India a few enlightened parents used to send their visually impaired children to regular schools and these children used to benefit though largely with the support of their parents. However, full fledged integrated education programmes emerged only in 1970s. Since 1980, the field has witnessed a phenomenal growth of integrated education. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and in the last century both Governmental and non-government organization began to make efforts to provide education to disabled children. Many new programmes with good intentions were developed and introduced. But the results were both encouraging and discouraging. Encouraging because people began to have concern for persons with disabilities, discouraging because the coverage remained painfully small. India has had the experience of implementing formal integrated education for the children with disabilities over the last three decades. Although the Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme, which is presently being implemented in the country, has been recognized as a successful programme, it has created some challenges too, as the large numbers of persons still remain to be integrated from the various cultures in this country. Therefore based on the experience of RCI, strategies for reinclusion are being worked upon to promote reinclusion of persons with disabilities in Indian context. These are:

The most important strategy for reinclusion is to empower the parents at each and every level. The monitoring of all the schemes related to the education of the children with disabilities can be done at local level by involving the parents and community. Parents of learners with disabilities and community leaders should be involved to monitor the qualitative progress of the children at grass root level. The parents may involve themselves in networking at the grass root level through regular interaction between integrated Schools and Special Schools for the proper and effective utilization of resources from the government as well as that of the community.

Religious leaders can also play an important role in implementing inclusion concept in a country like India where different religious ideas are dominating the social movements. The religious leaders may be involved in the process to motivate common people and create positive attitudes among community towards persons with disabilities.

Success stories of persons with disabilities and live demonstration of those stories by involving them can be more effective to create awareness among the communities. When a person is observing that a disabled person is working like a non-disabled person then the person with disability definitely get acceptance in the society.

Encouraging the Involvement of the persons with disabilities in familial, social and economic activities will be of immense help for the persons with disabilities to be re-included in the society. This will help in creating a positive image of the capabilities of a person with disability on one hand and his/her usefulness on the other.

The role of media in this is very powerful. Effective involvement of the media in creating awareness can be used to inform the community regarding the new approaches in education particularly about the educational needs of learners with disabilities. Local campaign committees in all political units should be set up for this purpose. Agencies, working specifically for the education, training and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, should work together with local campaign committee to spread the awareness through the media and other agencies.

Realizing the importance of community acceptance of the rights of the persons with disabilities, a strategy has to be framed which will develop some programmes to create positive community attitude towards learners with disabilities, and to enhance respect for them. These programmes will include educating the local media, mainstream teachers, parents of learners with disabilities, peers, collegiate, parents of children without disabilities and community leaders about the changing views regarding the reinclusion of the disabled in the general education system and the importance of inclusive education. The use of proper language for describing the learners with disabilities (not using derogatory labels) will help in promoting positive models or success stories. Like the campaign committees, education committees also need to be set up to liaison with the media and other supportive individuals. The parents of the children with disabilities,

teachers, and community leaders will be the members of these committees. One member of these education committee will also be the member of the local monitoring committee at cluster level. The education committee will be responsible to involve the people at grass root level and to create awareness on inclusive education in the locality.

Coordination between campaign and education committees is of paramount importance as both of these will need to work in close cooperation and collaboration. For this purpose it is essential that a monitoring committee is set up at district level.

Curricular innovations: It is important the curriculum as whole and different aspects of curriculum such as textbooks methods of teaching, teaching material etc are made inclusive. For example, textbooks should be inclusive that is they should be usable by both children with visual impairment and the seeing ones. Similarly the teaching material, teaching aids and teaching methodology should be inclusive. Teaching aids must make using different contrasting colors and material of different textures. These and similar other curricular innovations would help the inclusion of children with visual impairment a reality.

Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), an apex regulatory body of India in the field of special education and rehabilitation, took the first initiative in the country to incorporate the philosophy of inclusion in the syllabus of special teacher training courses. The curriculum structure of B.Ed special education was brought to a level where special teacher was made to understand teaching philosophy of general education in addition to the special needs of a child with diverse needs. A foundation course of 45 days duration has been started for the in-service teachers by RCI under the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) of MHRD to bring out general teacher from their shell of segregation. The Council has also introduced a diploma course in early intervention to prepare personnel to provide quality services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. This programme ultimately will pave the way for inclusion of the children with disabilities in the mainstream society. Empowerment of parents on one hand and general teachers, community leaders and peers of children with disabilities on the other should come together for effective implementation of inclusive education in the country. In this direction, two statutory bodies, namely, RCI and National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) have entered into a MOU for ensuring development of need-based teacher training programmes to cater to the special needs of children with disabilities. Considering the importance of the parents in the process of inclusion RCI has initiated Parent sensitization programme in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The programme aims at educating the parents of children with disabilities so that these children can get proper education from the very beginning of life. The launch of this programme of Parent Sensitization is a revolutionary step for creating much needed awareness where in through the involvement of hundreds of

NGOs on voluntary basis are engaged in educating the parents and other associated people. This will create a voluntary revolution in re-including the children with disabilities.

### **Conclusion**

General education today is subject to several criticisms that it, being overly westernized, has failed to comprehend the need of the time. It has failed to adapt to the special features and needs of particular cultures; that it has not reached all the able and the disabled students despite decades of effort; and so on. This is all the more so with the current special education and inclusive education controversy. They involve a form of exclusion by preparing special educators, leaving the general teacher quite in the dark about the special needs of disadvantaged students. The inclusion of children with various disabilities is the need of hour. The time has come when all involved in the education of children with disabilities and those in the education of nondisabled children make concerted efforts and join hands to make all that is necessary to bring all children regardless of abilities/disabilities with in the educational system. In Indian culture inclusion is already there in the families. The acceptance of the children with disabilities in the society is necessary for re-inclusion. Reinclusion is to be done by promoting voluntary participation of every section of the society. Rehabilitation Council of India has started its venture to re-include the children with disabilities by a mass voluntary movement in sensitizing the parents of the country.

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