Ethics, Equity and Inclusive Education: Fostering Strategies

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ABSTRACT:

Since education makes the room for equality and empowerment, every child has the right to get education. Many children with disabilities have become victim to an educational system, which is not able to meet their individuals' needs. Inclusive education is a human right issue. Inclusive education means that all children, regardless of their strength or weaknesses accommodated in a school and become part of the school community. Inclusive education encourages bringing all students together in one classroom and following the same curriculum regardless of their diversities. India is one of the few countries world over where the education of children with special needs does not fall within the purview of human resource development ministry. Inclusive Education (IE) 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. Inclusive schools have to address the needs of all children in every community and the central and state governments have to train their teachers to manage inclusive classrooms.

Key words: Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Disabilities, Inclusion

Introduction

In 1945, the League of Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the field of education, Article 26 of the Declaration proclaims the right of every citizen to an appropriate education regardless of gender, race, colour and religion. This right is also enshrined in the constitutions of all independent nations. The question is to what extent are national governments guaranteeing the right of 'every' citizen to an 'appropriate' education as we approach the new millennium? What measures are in place at national and local level to address imbalances in education?

In almost every country, children and adults are excluded from formal education altogether, some of those who go to school do not complete. They are gradually and deliberately pushed out of the school system because schools are not sensitive to their learning styles and backgrounds. In a gesture of sympathy, some children are sorted out into categories and placed in separate special schools, away from their peers. This has led to the development of two separate systems of education within countries, regular

and special education. However, in recent years the rationale for having two parallel national systems of education has been questioned and the foundations of 'special education' have begun to crumble. The thinking that has developed during the last 50 years in the disability field has had significant influences not only on special education but also on practice in regular education. Current thinking and knowledge demands that the responsibility for ALL learners should remain with the regular classroom teacher. It is this thinking that we are here to explore during the two days of this workshop.

The theme, "Inclusive Education: A Challenge for Teacher Education" chosen for the workshop, provides us with an opportunity to re-examine our thinking and practice in the context of Namibia, whether we are in special or regular education, especially those of us interested in teacher education. However, it is important that the re-examination of our thinking and practice is also set within the wider international context.

We are all now familiar with the 1990 *World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs.* The Declaration states that, *inter alia:*

Basic education should be provided to all children... To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded, and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities (Article 3.1).
(UNESCO, 1998:3)

Despite the rather token mention of special needs at the Jomtien Conference, there is now greater recognition that the special needs agenda should be viewed as a significant part of the drive for Education for All (Ainscow, 1995). The idea is that the concept of integration should be replaced by a move towards inclusive schooling/education. Integration demands that "additional arrangements will be made to accommodate" pupils with disabilities "within a system of schooling that remains largely unchanged"; inclusive education, on the other hand, aims to restructure schools in order to respond to the learning needs of all children (Ainscow, 1995: 1). Thus integration calls for separate arrangements in the regular school for exceptional children, mainly those traditionally labelled as disabled, through such practices as withdrawal, remedial education and/or mainstreaming. However, inclusive schooling, in the first instance, recognises that special learning needs can arise from social, psychological, economic, linguistic, cultural as well as physical (or disability) factors, hence the use of the term "children with special needs" rather than "children with disabilities". Second, it recognises that any child can have trouble in learning, short-lived or long-term, at any time during the school career and, therefore, the school must continually review itself to meet the needs of all its learners.

But how has the concept of inclusive education developed? Did the Jomtien Conference spark it off? Who is behind this movement? I, therefore, intend, in this paper, to show how the inclusive education movement was born and the inclusive education approach can ensure that the right to an appropriate education is guaranteed. I also want to argue that the measures currently in place will not guarantee this right unless there are major reforms in the education systems. The tide is moving towards those reforms, some experiments are already underway, but obstacles to the changes are indeed great. Perhaps the

greatest of these obstacles is the unwillingness of those who wield different types of power, and thus make important decisions as to why and who should be excluded from receiving an appropriate education, to surrender power. Many disability groups, including Disabled People's International (DPI), have argued that disability is socially constructed; it is the barriers that , society places on certain groups of people that create disability. Mike Oliver, a wheel chair using professor of social work at Greenwich University, has argued that the politics of disablement is a lively area of social engagement (Oliver, 1990). A number of sociologists have also argued that we have the politics of special needs (see, for example, Fulcher, 1989). All these analyses point to some explanation why some people excluded from schooling and from receiving an appropriate education. Let me now consider first exclusion of persons with special needs in education before the turn of this century, before I present arguments for inclusion and its obstacles.

Institutionalisation of Persons with Disability

The history of disability is not a subject for celebration in view of the inherent violation of human rights, as we know them today. People with disabilities (PWDs) were considered to pose a social threat, to contaminate an otherwise pure human species. People with disability were killed and used as objects of entertainment. As such, the society had to be protected from PWDs and the converse was also true, the latter had to be protected from society. Philanthropists found it imperative that PWDs should be given custodial care. These attitudes led to PWDs being placed in asylums where they were fed and clothed. Asylums were not meant to be educational institutions (Pritchard, 1960; Bender, 1970). Some PWDs, mainly those with physical and intellectual impairments as well as mentally ill persons, were placed in hospitals for custodial care and treatment. This is the period of institutionalisation. Special schools began to emerge in the 15th Century, starting with those with sensory impairments. Other disability groups were considered for special schools when public schooling were expanded. The emphasis in the early special schools was on vocational skills. Their curriculum was thus different from that in public schools. In addition, these early schools belonged to private philanthropic organisations. Government involvement came in much later.

It was not until the late 1950s that categorisation of people with disabilities into separate groups and institutionalisation began to be questioned. Institutionalisation removed PWDs from the cultural norms of the society to which they rightly belonged. This led to the concept of normalisation, first developed in Scandinavian countries, especially Denmark and Sweden. Wolfensberger (1972: 28) defined normalisation as: Utilisation of means which are as culturally normative as possible, in order to establish and/or maintain personal behaviours and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible. Institutions considered artificial and counter-productive. Transfer from institutions to and integration into, normal community settings required considerable adjustment. Despite the adjustment problem, it was considered necessary to implement normalisation or de-institutionalisation. This process is still going on today, with more and more mentally ill persons being placed in the community, with some support.

In education, normalisation means making maximum use of the regular school system with a minimum resort to separate facilities. It may, therefore, be argued that normalisation gave rise to the concept of integration. However, normalisation did not recognise the existence of a wide range of individual differences in the society and "the diversity of educational, vocational and other opportunities that are available to people in the adult world" (Jenkinson, 1997: 12). We need also to question who and what is 'normal' as well as the value of programmes that ensure conformity to some predetermined norm of behaviour. Under normalisation, people's individuality seems to be overlooked.

Special Education

Despite the criticisms against normalisation, attempts have been made to defend the placement of children and young people with disabilities in special schools and integrated provision, which are the components of the special education system. It has been argued that regular classroom teachers are relieved "of the need to devise and implement curricula for students who appeared unable to learn from normal instruction in the regular class" (Jenkinson, 1997: 13). However, this argument is in itself excluding in that children with disabilities have to follow a different curriculum from that of the regular school.

The creation of special education introduced several educational problems. I will list only six here. These are:

1. Children who qualify for special education have something wrong with them that make it difficult for them to participate in the regular school curriculum; they thus receive a curriculum that is different from that of their peers.

2. Children with disabilities and other conditions are labelled and excluded from the mainstream of society. Assessment procedures tend to categorise students and this has damaging effects on teacher and parent expectations and on the students' self-concept (Ainscow, 1991; Jenkinson, 1997).

3. Unfair methods of identification and assessment have led to a disproportionate number of students from ethnic minority groups. For example, in both Europe and North America, black, Asian and Latino-American students are overrepresented in special schools and programmes; thus, special education is being accused of legalising racial segregation (Jenkinson, 1997; Wang et al., 1990).

4. The presence of specialists in special education encourages regular classroom teachers to pass on to others responsibility for children they regard as special (Ainscow, 1991).

5. Resources that might otherwise be used to provide more flexible and responsive forms of schooling are channelled into separate provision (Ainscow, 1991).

6. The emphasis on Individualised Educational Plans and task analysis in special education tends to lower teacher expectations of the students. In addition, task analysis and the associated behavioural teaching strategies introduce disjointed knowledge and skills thus making learning less meaningful to students (Sebba, Byers and Rose, 1993).

To respond to these apparent weaknesses, integration was seen as a reasonable arrangement. Integration recognises the existence of a continuum of services, from the special school, special class to the regular class with or without support.

Most of the UN declarations have supported special education as a continuum of provision. Indeed, the UN does not provide leadership in specific fields out of context. Policy proposals reflect professional thinking, research and practice at the time. For instance, I would like to argue that policy and legislative developments in the United States and the United Kingdom had the most significant impact on the activities of the UN and its specialised agencies. The passing of PL42-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) with its emphasis on the least restrictive environment in 1975 in the USA and the UK Warnock Report of 1978 and the subsequent 1981 Education Act abolishing disability categories and introducing the term "special educational needs" set the scene and basis for international action. One such action was the endorsement of these developments by the political and professional community in the Sundberg Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Action and Strategies for Prevention, Education and Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities held at the Spanish city of Torremolinos in November 1981 (UNESCO, 1981). The emphasis at the Torremolinos Conference was educational integration, allowing for a continuum from locational, social to functional integration. Although the terms 'special educational needs' and 'Least Restrictive Environment' call for abandoning categories of disability and associated labels as well as increased provision in the regular class, there has not been agreement in practice at national and local level. For example, in Africa, the 1980s saw the mushrooming of special classes and units in all areas of disability (e.g. physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional and learning difficulties) despite the purported abolition of categories (UNESCO, 1985).

Inclusive Schooling

At the same time, in the United States, professional advocacy groups claimed that the legislation did not go far enough. They, therefore, launched the Regular Education Initiative (REI) movement, which called for the merging of special and general education into one single system in which all children attended the regular community school. All special education staff, resources and learners with special needs, they recommended, should be integrated into the regular school (Skrtic, 1991). Some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, left the debate open, but emphasised on parental choice (Jenkinson, 1997). The United Kingdom, while advocating for education in the regular class, has introduced, through the Code of Practice, assessment procedures, which lead to a child being 'statement ' by the Local Education Authority (LEA). The statement ensures that resources are made available to the child. It is obvious that the concept of increased parental choice and detailed assessment procedures work against the REI movement. Indeed, endorse the practice of exclusion. Alongside the Regular Education Initiative (REI) another movement was initiated by advocacy groups on severe intellectual impairments, such as The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH), which promoted the rights and well-being of people with severe intellectual disability (Jenkinson, 1997). This is the inclusive schooling movement.

Like the REI, it proposes the merging of special and general education, but it goes beyond this. It does not believe in the existence of a continuum of provision, from special school, special class to regular class. There should be only one unified education system. The proponents of inclusive schooling call for a restructuring of the school to accommodate all learners and advocate radical changes to the curriculum, claiming that current curricula were perpetuating exclusion, dividing those learners who could meet their objectives as they are from those who could not (Ainscow, 1991, 1994; Jenkinson, 1997).

Research on inclusive schooling has focused on school improvement in terms of whole school responses as well as teaching strategies that include all learners (Ainscow, 1991, 1994). In the early 1980s, UNESCO carried out a survey on teacher education in 14 countries involving all world regions (UNESCO, 1986). The findings showed that regular classroom teachers were willing to take on the responsibility for special needs children, but were not confident whether they had the skills to carry out that task. Most teachers felt they needed training in the special needs field. These findings suggested the need for in- service training for regular classroom teachers, through teacher trainers. UNESCO, therefore, set up a project, led by Professor Mel Ainscow, now at the University of Manchester, to develop materials and teaching strategies that would meet the need of teachers in inclusive schools. Regional workshops were held for Africa, (Nairobi, Kenya), Asia (Beijing, China), Middle East (Amman, Jordan), Europe (Romania), Latin America (Chile) and North America (Canada). Resource Teams were set up for preparing and trialling materials that had to be culturally relevant. Between 1988 and 1993, the project teams met, trailed the materials and ran workshops. The outcome was the currently widely distributed materials, including the Special Needs in the Classroom: Teachers Resources Pack (UNESCO, 1993), Special Needs Classroom A Teacher Guide (Ainscow, 1994) and two videos, Inclusive Schools and Training video. These materials have been highly beneficial in improving school practice, giving skills and confidence to regular classroom teachers.

The success of these materials and various experiments carried out on inclusive schooling in different parts of the world led UNESCO to convene, with assistance of the government of Spain, the 1994 World Conference at Salamanca. The delegates deliberated on the elimination of exclusive practices for children and young people with special needs arising from social, economic, psychological and physical conditions. At the end of the conference, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action unanimously adopted by acclamation (UNESCO, 1994). The implications for inclusive schooling are wide. Different countries, regional, local communities and professionals are at different levels of conceptualisation. While some are at the inclusive, School for all, stage, others are at the special school stage, and still others somewhere in-between.

Inclusive Education

So far, I have presented educational development in relation to persons with special needs in terms of schooling. Indeed, education, in the eyes of economists and educational planners, has been

presented in literature as if it existed mainly within the context of schooling. Informal and non-formal education are often not their concern. Yet those who are excluded from schooling benefit from these forms of education in order to become usefully contributing members of their communities. For many individuals with special needs in many countries, these are the only forms of education. Ociiti (1994:19) has described informal education as the "spontaneous learning by individuals as they interact with their social and physical environment in their process of day-to-day living... purely on their own initiatives or through the processes of stimulated learning and directed practice". Non-formal education, on the other hand, is said to cover all forms of learning, including functional literacy classes, outside the formal, school system. Coombs has described these non-school forms of learning as the "shadow systems of education" (Cannen, 1996:61). Economists have traditionally not recognised the significant role of informal and non-formal learning, and the development of the informal sector, in developing inquiry, reflection, creativity and locally relevant and appropriate technology and in producing affordable consumer goods, branding it as traditional and inferior. The economists' position has influenced some educationalists to consider informal and non-formal learning as an insignificant part of an education system. It is rarely included in the description and discussion of national education systems in major textbooks and journals. This omission was obviously the case at the Jomtien Conference (Fordham, 1991: 173). Fordham argues that the goal of Education for All (EFA) may not be met if education development relies entirely on existing schools, especially for "out-of-school children and under-educated and/or underemployed youth and adults" (p. 174) and, I would quickly add, children and adults with special learning needs. In fact, some people in the latter group could benefit more from ecologically and culturally relevant non-formal learning. Indeed, this educational arrangement would augur well with the spirit of the inclusive education movement, which calls for radical changes in the curriculum to include functional skills (Jenkinson, 1997). On a broader scale, it is now being accepted that the contribution of informal and non-formal learning and production (learning by doing) in both urban and rural areas, though unrecorded, is what sustains the life of nations (Bray, Clarke and Stephens, 1986). The ongoing criticism of the dual economy, as a false classification of the economy into pre-existing and modern under foreign influence, has led to a movement towards acceptance of the informal sector as an integral part of a nation's economy. What was needed was a rediversification of indigenous economy with a view to modernising it, rather than replacing it. Indeed, the literacy campaigns of the 1960s and early 1970s with dramatic reductions in illiteracy in some countries have resulted in the legitimisation of informal or non-formal education. This integrative economic view, and indeed educational involving informal, formal and non-formal creation and transformation of knowledge (Cannen, 1996) -allows individuals and communities to contribute and benefit from an expanded range of possibilities or choices in the content to be learned and goods to be produced (Marglin, 1990). In addition, whilst the formal or modem sector has failed to create jobs, the informal or "traditional" sector holds greater promise in increasing employment opportunities. For some young people with profound and/or multiple learning needs, informal and non-formal learning could be an important complementary option.

But informal and non-formal forms of learning are not new. These are mainly indigenous forms of education, principles of which could be even used to advantage in the formal settings of the school (Dovey, 1994). As argued elsewhere, indigenous education was and is, inclusive. We need only to consider the principles, which guided indigenous forms of education. These include (Kisanji, 1998: 58-60):

1. Absence or limited differentiation in space, time and status: indigenous customary education was available and accessible to all community members, wherever they were, during waking hours

2. Relevance of content and methods:: the content of education was drawn from the physical or natural and social environments, both of which were intricately tied to the religious/'spiritual life of the people

3. Functionality of knowledge and skills: all the knowledge, attitudes and skills embodied in the curriculum were based on cultural transmission, knowledge creation and transformation

4. Community orientation: all educational content and practice was based on and within the community.

These principles of universality, relevance, functionality and community localisation are essential for a successful inclusive education system. Some of the teaching approaches and methods considered to facilitate effective learning in schools today are the natural part of African indigenous education. Here I have in mind co-operative and collaborative learning and child-to-child learning opportunities. However, due to our veneration of ideas and systems from outside, perhaps because of our history, we have all along ignored these practices in our communities, only for research elsewhere to establish their effectiveness (Hawes, 1988; UNESCO, 1993).

Inclusive schooling, on the other hand, is opposed to the concept and practice of special education. It demands that schools should change in order to be able to meet the learning needs of all children in a given community. It seeks to improve the learning outcomes of students in academic achievements, social skills and personal development. Clearly this is the purpose of the school improvement movement, which aims to develop schools that are effective for all. Effective schools see pupils having trouble in learning "as indicators of the need for reform" (Ainscow, 1991: 3). These schools are characterised by (Ainscow, 1991; Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994):

1. Strong administrative leadership and attention to quality of instruction

2. Emphasis on student acquisition of basic skills

3. High expectations for students and confidence among teachers that they can deal with children's individual needs

4. Commitment to provide a broad and balanced range of curriculum experiences for all children

5. Orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning

6. Arrangements for supporting individual members of staff through staff development, using both the workshop and the workplace.

7. Frequent monitoring of student progress

Effective schools are thus closely tied with effective teaching. School improvement and effective research, which is at the heart of inclusive education, points to three important needs. First, there is the need for quality teacher education involving pre-service training for all teachers and staff development in

the form of advanced studies, the workshop and the workplace. School heads require additional training in order to play an effective leadership role. Second, there is the need for further research, especially school-based inquiry in order to improve practice. Lastly, there is also the need to make formal education relevant in content and process to the social and cultural environment of learners.

Conclusion:

While we are engaging with school improvement and management of change, I would like to end this presentation with a tacit reminder of the stark reality of life: change is sometimes painful. When we become used to certain ways of doing things, we tend to resist change. Change will be more painful to those of us who have made a living out of, and wield some power in, special education. However, if we believe in Education for All, we need to surrender the power we hold and work collaboratively to create effective schools and inclusive education.

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