Achievements of and Innovations for Persons with Disabilities

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For Inclusion...*and* Beyond!

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ISSUES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION - ASPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

For certain reasons special needs education has always been of inferior importance both in developed and developing countries. Stereotypically, children with disabilities have been deemed to be indifferent to education and unable to perform as perfectly as others. This misconception led to exclusion of children with disabilities in education which left them out of focus not only in education but also in almost all areas of social life. Therefore this sphere always demanded special, harder and affectionate consideration throughout all stages of history as disabilities vary in terms of mental and physical aspects and both require deep consideration and professional approach in every corner of the world. Nowadays many countries are committed to inclusive education do their best to give way to inclusion within education system. However, as experience indicates, it is not easy task. There are several issues which need to be taken into serious consideration for the appropriate and effective realization of inclusive education. Below, some of those issues relating to historical, theoretical and practical aspects of inclusive education are discussed.

Integration

As an educational terminology "integration" has been used for a long period of time, and this education format still exists in some countries. Integration means the process of transferring CSN from special schools to mainstream schools (Thomas et al., 2005). This process urged the children "to fit in" to the classroom setting and school environment. But the overall results of the process were assimilation However, unlike integration, the emergence of inclusion concentrated on transformation of profoundly rooted structural obstacles rather than assimilation. This transformation changed dominant interpretation of "success", "failure", "ability" and so on (Barton, 2003).

Inclusive education

Basically, IE means educating learners with special educational needs in regular education settings. However, IE is not limited to only placement. Rather, it means facilitating education of students with special needs with a whole suite of provisions which include curriculum adaptation, adapted teaching methods, modified assessment techniques, and accessibility arrangements. In short, inclusive education is a multi-component strategy or, perhaps, a mega- strategy (Mitchell, 2008).

Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve education for all (EFA). Inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2009).

International principles of inclusive education

International principles of inclusive education are defined in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994): 1. The guiding principle that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions; 2. Special needs education incorporates the proven principles of sound pedagogy from which all children may benefit; 3. The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have; 4. Within inclusive schools, children with special educational needs should receive whatever extra support they may require to ensure their effective education; 5. Special attention should be paid to the needs of children and youth with severe or multiple disabilities; 6. Curricula should be adapted to children's needs, not vice versa; 7. Children with special needs should receive additional instructional support in the context of the regular curriculum, not a different curriculum.

Classroom arrangement

Effective educators consider classroom environment and make necessary adaptations in order to make sure that it facilitates academic and social needs of students (Friend and Bursuck, 2006). Since one of the essential preliminaries of inclusive classroom is suitable classroom arrangement that contributes to learning and development of all students including those with special needs, it is important to form a universal design so that all students have physical access to all materials and activities. Universal design for classroom environment includes principles that support creating classroom environment and instructions so that they lead to learning of all children (Samuels, 2007). For Burgstahler (2010), universal design means arranging classroom setting to be usable by all students without modifying and applying special design. Pielstick (1999) classified three aspects of the classroom environment: the physical, social and instructional. Sundstrom et al. (1990) also suggest that classroom arrangement that promotes informal and face-to face interaction empower inter-member communication and higher level of integrated group activities.

The concept of academic achievement

Student achievement forms the basis of almost aspects of education. Simply, achievement means "the accomplishment of something", and in education that "something" generally refers to articulated learning goals. Although learning process takes place in various contexts, the focus of educators rests on learning that occurs in established instructional environments such as schools and classrooms where educators interact with students to help them achieve explicit knowledge and skills (Guskey, 2013). For Fisher et al. (1995) academic achievement refers to successful performance in schooling. Schooling, in its term, includes academic skills such as writing, reading, problem solving etc. which are integral parts of academic content. School environment is critically important for advanced educational performance.

The role of a classroom teacher

As a result of the inclusive education movement, classroom teachers have become significantly more involved in the education. The attitude of the class teacher towards students has a major impact on the success of all students, particularly those with special needs. Classroom teachers must be able to perform different skills, such as the following: acting as a team member on assessment and IEP committees; being innovative in providing equal education opportunities for all students, including CSN; and individualizing instruction for CSN; advocating for CSN. To sum up, classroom teachers control educational programs for all students (Smith et al., 1998).

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