

**CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND QUALITY SCHOOLING**

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**ABSTRACT**

Educating children with special needs has become an issue of great concern for many educators and administrators. Because inclusion and inclusive classrooms carry with them a number of inherent problems, many within the educational arena are attempting to streamline the process of educational inclusion. Included among these efforts are the committees and programs that have been designed at the early childhood and primary grade level to help parents, children and educators identify the best possible solutions to one of education's most difficult dilemmas. A strong advocate in this effort is the National Association of School Psychologists. The children with special needs skip milestones of development due to their disabilities and miss out on important experience thus developing secondary handicaps.

**KEYWORDS:** Inclusive Education, Children with Special needs, Quality, School

**INTRODUCTION**

When it comes to children with special needs there are different categories that the children can fall in. Within each of these categories there are different teaching methods that have to be used and different types of training that the teacher will need.

Children with special needs are tested and then put into the appropriate group as to the disability that they have. There are several different types of special needs such as autism, behavior disorders, Cerebral Palsy, Down syndrome, Alcohol related brain injuries, and brain injuries in general. With a degree in special education you would be able to cover the training for each of these disabilities and be able to handle the children that have these disabilities in your classroom. No matter what, when you are faced with a situation where you have a child in your classroom with one of these disabilities, you need to remember that they are still human and that they need to be treated with the same

respect and patience that all the other children receive. As a teacher, the lessons will need to be tailored to fit what each individual will need and the child will most likely need to be placed in a group with other students that have relating disabilities. When it comes to autism a teacher may need to have training to handle the communication barrier that these students have because they have difficulties with verbal skills. Teachers who deal with children with cerebral palsy may need special train to help these children with their fine motor skills and just basic living skills. These are just a few of the training that teachers will have to undergo to be well prepared for any of these disabilities. Children with disabilities and special needs also have the right to education just as normal children do.

### **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Inclusive education strives to address the learning needs of children with special needs, with a particular focus on those who are subject to being isolated and excluded. The philosophy behind inclusive education is to promote opportunities for all children to participate, learn and have equal treatment, irrespective of their mental or physical abilities. While the awareness on inclusive education in schools throughout the country is still at an infancy stage, educational institutions are somewhat sceptical about having both normal and special children studying in the same classroom. And in circumstances, where a former excluded child is given admission into a mainstream classroom, the outcome of the action is questionable.

Lack of flexibility in curriculum, inability to fend for them and thus being bullied by others in the class and not getting adequate attention from the teacher are common issues. All these may result in the child not getting a fair inclusive education. As a result, the number of children with special needs receiving higher education is on the decline.

In India, a majority of children with special needs do not receive any formal education, in spite of the practice of inclusive education in some schools. This is because children with disabilities and learning deficiencies are segregated from mainstream schools and other regular routines and social activities of normal children.

Other contributing factors to this situation are lack of affordability and awareness on the kind of education choices available to children with special needs.

Hence, inclusive education becomes a key reason for integrating a special child with the mainstream. According to Dr. Mithu Alur, founder of the Spastics Society of India and coordinator at the National

Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI), "Children need to be with other children. Sending them to a school for disabled will not help." Inclusive schools have to be well-equipped in all aspects to cater and deliver quality education for all children.

This includes having a balanced curriculum that is appropriate for all categories of children, teachers who have the ability to handle the individual needs within the classroom and thereby promote an environment where personal development, social skills and student participation are strongly encouraged.

Another critical aspect of inclusive education for a special needs child is in having the acceptance and friendship of classmates. This kind of support also aids in the progress of special children and helps them gain confidence within the school environment.

Further, parents have a vital role as partners to make inclusive education successful within the classroom.

This is possible when the children with special needs continue to live at home and attend school, just like normal children.

Parents should also be involved with the teachers and administrative staff at the school to coordinate travel arrangements, school activities and learning materials for their special child.

The Heritage School located in Kolkata is well-known for its inclusive education philosophy where in children special needs are combined with the mainstream children to encourage overall improved student learning. The school has created a need-based programme with its educators to focus on its special students to allow them to discover their own skills and work on them to catch up with their peers. Meenakshi Atal, the Vice Principal of the school says, "Participation is key to academic inclusion and we ensure that the participation of the children with special needs in all mainstream activities happens to the best of their abilities."

The Indian government continues to include children special needs under several of their education initiatives, including the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This is a government programme that aims at improving and providing quality primary education for all children. There are several national and local NGOs that champion the cause of children with disabilities and provide specific resource centres in support of inclusive education.

For instance, the Spastics Society of India has a division that aims at promoting the right of children with cerebral palsy to inclusive education.

There are also private schools in the country such as The Heritage School, Akshar School, Vydehi School of Excellence, Chettinad Srihari Vikasam etc. that offer individualised learning programmes for children with special needs.

In conclusion, children with special needs have a distinctive experience undergoing inclusive education along with normal, non-disabled classmates. There are several barriers for providing education to special children in a regular classroom.

We can overcome these obstacles by creating more awareness on inclusive education, by schools having the resources and the ability to re-structure their curriculum to cater to all types of students, by recruiting teachers who have the skills and proficiency to meet varying demands within the classroom and by having the support of family.

In the popular mind, special needs are usually identified with very low expectations. Parent should believe in the value of educating children with special needs. The higher the expectations, the higher will be their acceptance in the family.

All the children with special needs must be enrolled in primary schools. After the assessment of their disabilities by a team of a doctor, a psychologist, and a special educator, in schools, the child will be placed in appropriate educational settings. Children with mild and moderate disabilities of any kind may be integrated in normal schools, severe in special schools/ remedial schools, drop outs that have problems in availing benefits of normal schools can join open schools. All the children with learning disabilities alone are first managed in the normal schools. Open and special schools also offer vocational courses also for children with disabilities.

#### **FORMAL SCHOOLS**

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Secondary and Higher Education) has been implementing a scheme of 'Integrated Education for the Disabled Children' (IEDC) in formal schools since 1982. The main objective of the scheme is to provide educational opportunities for the disabled children in normal schools so as to facilitate their retention in the school system. The disabled children who are placed in special schools should be considered for integration into common schools once they acquire the communication and daily living skills at a functional level.

The following types of children with disabilities must be integrated in the normal school system- formal as well as in non- formal schools.

Children with locomotor handicaps (O.H.)

Mildly and moderately hearing impaired

Partially sighted children

Mentally handicapped educable group (IQ 50-70)

Children with multiple handicaps (blind and orthopaedic, hearing impaired and

Orthopaedic, educable mentally retarded and orthopaedic, visual impaired and mild hearing impaired)

A three-member assessment team comprising of a doctor, a psychologist and a special educator is formed and their assessment report recommends whether a child can be enrolled directly into a normal school or should receive preparation in a special school/ or a special preparatory class in Early Childhood Education Centre(ECCE) specially equipped for this purpose. Under the IEDC scheme, resources and itinerant teachers are provided. Children are also given certain incentives like book allowance, equipment allowance, transport-allowance etc.

## **CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND AND QUALITY SCHOOLING**

### **Five Ways to Help Students with Special Needs**

Learning disabilities impact the way children are able to process and understand information; they are neurological disorders that might manifest themselves as difficulty listening, thinking, writing, speaking, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, visual perception disorders, auditory processing disorders, and language disorders fall under the umbrella of learning disorders. Many children with ADHD also have comorbid learning disorders.

An idea teachers must understand is that students with special needs such as learning disabilities need to be taught differently or need some accommodations to enhance the learning environment.

Not everyone learns in the same way, and you can follow some tips to create a well-rounded learning atmosphere.

- 1. Maintain an organized classroom and limit distractions.** For students with special needs, maintaining a healthy balance of structure and unstructured processes is important. For example, on each student's desk, have a place for everything that is clearly labeled (use words or colors, for instance). Also consider using checklists and help students keep their notebooks organized; teach them how to do so on their own, but also check at the end of each day and offer suggestions for keeping it more organized. On the unstructured side of things, allow students with special needs to change their work area while completing homework or studying and assign tasks that involve

moving around the room. For students with special needs and learning disabilities, hearing instructions or following directions can be made difficult if there are too many distractions. Schedule breaks throughout the day and seat students with special needs in an area of the classroom that limits distractions; for example, do not sit these children by a window, in front of an open door, or by the air conditioner, as people walking by or additional noises might be too distracting.

- 2. Use music and voice inflection.** When transitioning to an activity, use a short song to finish up one task and move to another. Many of us have sung the “clean up” while cleaning up before the next activity; use a similar approach in the classroom. Students with special needs might also respond well to varied voice inflection and tone, so use a mixture of loud, soft, and whisper sounds. Using proper pronunciation and sometimes slightly exaggerating proper speech will help a child model the same principles.
- 3. Break down instructions into smaller, manageable tasks.** Students with special needs often have difficulty understanding long-winded or several instructions at once. For children with learning disabilities, it is best to use simple, concrete sentences. You might have to break down a step into a few smaller steps to ensure your students with special needs understand what you are asking. You might even want to put the directions both in print and saying them verbally. Ask your students with special needs to repeat the directions and ask them to demonstrate that they understand. Do not give further instructions until a student has completed the previous task.
- 4. Use multi-sensory strategies.** As all children learn in different ways, it is important to make every lesson as multi-sensory as possible. Students with learning disabilities might have difficulty in one area, while they might excel in another. For example, use both visual and auditory cues. Create opportunities for tactile experiences. You might need to use physical cues, such as a light touch, when a student might get distracted or inattentive. Get creative with your lesson plans, and students with special needs will appreciate the opportunity to use their imaginations or try something new; use a balance of structure and familiar lessons with original content.
- 5. Give students with special needs opportunities for success.** Children with learning disabilities often feel like they do not succeed in certain areas, but structuring lessons that lead to successful results is a way to keep them motivated. Provide immediate reinforcement for accomplishments, be consistent with rules and discipline, correct errors and reward students when they make these

corrections themselves explain behavioral expectations, and teach and demonstrate appropriate behaviors rather than just expecting students with special needs to pick them up.

While these suggestions are ideal for classroom settings, parents of students with special needs can also implement these principles. Helping children with learning disabilities both in and out of the classroom is the best way to help your students with special needs achieve success.

In general, educational provision for children with special needs is made:

- In special schools;
- In special classes attached to ordinary schools;
- In integrated settings in mainstream classes.

The nature and level of the educational response is based on the child's professionally-assessed disability. The Department's policy is to achieve as much integration as possible, as envisaged in Section 2 of the EPSEN Act. Where placement in an integrated setting is considered to be the appropriate response, provision will normally take the form of resource teaching or special needs assistant support, or both, depending on the pupil's assessed level of need.

While the DES' policy is to ensure the maximum possible integration of children with special needs into ordinary mainstream schools, students who have been assessed as having special educational needs have access to a range of special support services. The services range from special schools dedicated to particular disability groups, through special classes/units attached to ordinary schools, to placement on an integrated basis in ordinary schools with supports.

Children with more severe levels of disability may require placement in a special school or special class attached to a mainstream primary school. Each such facility is dedicated to a particular disability group and each operates at a specially reduced pupil teacher ratio. Pupils attending these facilities attract special rates of capitation funding and are entitled to avail of the special school transport service and the school bus escort service.

Autism is an "umbrella" term used to describe a group of multifaceted developmental brain disorders known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD). The other pervasive developmental disorders are PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified), Asperger's Syndrome, Rett Syndrome and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Most parents and professionals refer to these groups as Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Children with autism have difficulties learning naturally from their environment, which is how most

children without disabilities learn. A child with autism may show little interest in the world or people around him or her. While all children with autism are capable of learning and developing, they may still always have differences in their behavior and cognition.

The term cerebral palsy refers to any one of a number of neurological disorders that appear in infancy or early childhood and permanently affect body movement and muscle coordination but don't worsen over time. Even though cerebral palsy affects muscle movement, it isn't caused by problems in the muscles or nerves.

Making sure that a child with cerebral palsy has access to their classroom environment is critical to creating an inclusive classroom setting. Rearranging the furniture so that a child using a walker or wheelchair can maneuver in and out of learning centers; making sure that items can be reached by all children; and modifying classroom activities to meet the unique needs of your students are all essential to creating a supportive and accessible environment for children with C.P.

Language-based learning disabilities (such as Dyslexia) are problems with age appropriate reading, spelling, and/or writing. This disorder is not about how smart a person is. Most people diagnosed with learning disabilities have average to superior intelligence

Using many different modes of communication in the classroom can help support children with language issues. Voice output devices, picture exchange communication system (PECS), sign-language and even just simplifying and modifying the language that the adults use in the classroom can help a child with a language disorder to better learn from their environment Down syndrome occurs when an individual has three, rather than two, copies of the 21st chromosome. This additional chromosome alters the course of development and causes the characteristics linked with Down syndrome.

Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal condition and can occur in people of all races and economic levels.

Some of the common physical characteristics of Down syndrome can be having are low muscle tone, small stature, an upward slant to the eyes, and a deep crease across the center of the palm. People with Down syndrome have an increased risk for developing other conditions such as hearing and vision problems, respiratory problems, and thyroid conditions. However, most of these issues are now treatable so most people with Down syndrome lead healthy lives.

Children with Down syndrome experience mild to moderate cognitive delays. Although they can learn

to sit, walk, talk, play, they may do these skills somewhat later than their peers without Down syndrome.

Quality early educational programs, a home environment that is interesting and responsive, good health care, and positive relationships with family and friends all help to increase a child with Down syndrome's success in life. Modifying fine motor activities such as zipping coats and pants, name writing, and cutting is helpful for a child with Down syndrome. Also providing lots of opportunities for them to practice gross motor skills such as walking up and down stairs, running and riding a tricycle will help in their development and learning of these important skills.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Children with disabilities studying in inclusive schools have unique experiences where they interact constantly with their non-disabled peers. It affects the development of their self-concept in areas related to academics, physical self, active self and social self. This paper elucidates the self-perceptions of children in these areas which to a large extent determine their adjustability in an inclusive school setting. The inclusion process is facilitated through support received from school, resource teachers, and parents particularly mothers. Our research findings highlight specific challenges faced by children with disabilities in inclusive schools in terms of peer relationships and attitudes of regular teachers. The main recommendations included recruitment of resource teachers in proportion to the numbers and needs of the enrolled children with disabilities in a school; pre-service and regular in-service training of regular teachers on issues related to managing inclusive classrooms, peer sensitisation; and introducing relevant alternative activities for children with disabilities. Implementing these processes in the inclusive educational system would enhance the participation of children with disabilities and foster their aspiration to be like their non-disabled peers. Indeed, the government could find that the cost of well-resourced specialist provision spread across all schools rather than centralised in resource centers more financially prohibitive than the current situation. However, the reconceptualization of IE as whole school issue appears to be essential if IE is to be more than physical relocation of children with disabilities in a mainstream classroom.

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