

Good Pedagogical Practices for Inclusive Education

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Introduction

“Inclusion means that we, as teachers, are responsible for all available support (from the government of the country of origin). Schools, communities, families, children, educational institutions, health services, community leaders, etc.) to find and educate ALL children”(UNESCO, 2005)

The impact of policy and legislation has dramatically changed the landscape of the education sector. A typical school classroom now has children of different cultural backgrounds, diversity, socio-economic status and diversity of people or persons with disabilities. Teachers must perceive the classroom as an academic and a social context as it provides a basis for dialogue and an opportunity to appreciate diversity that promotes equality and the development of an ecosystem for inclusive education. Although inclusive education includes children from disadvantaged social groups, linguistically gifted and talented, and ethnic minorities; this article specifically focuses on children with disability. One of the biggest challenges in developing inclusive practices for children is understanding them in terms of their social context and needs. In this regard, teachers play an important role.

As a teacher, one must understand the social, cultural and regional context in which learners grow up and accept human diversity. One of the most important qualities that one must develop in inclusive education is to be human and meet the requirements of inclusive education.

An inclusive teacher must be well-equipped not only for teaching, but also for understanding students and their cultural, social and community environment because these have a significant influence on students' learning. Therefore, the education of students should be the driving force behind learning which would in turn contribute to their development. Professional development is an important aspect of reflection for teachers as the practice of reflection helps in the development of their potential for effective integration of their competencies with good pedagogical practices for inclusive education. This article throws light on the knowledge and skills required to develop inclusive education teachers and allows them to develop inclusive pedagogical practices at school level.

Teaching and Learning in an Inclusive Environment

Class dynamics have changed over time. There is space for children with varied diversities. However, a number of factors

negatively affect students' learning, most prominently the socio-economic status and disabilities. So as a teacher, one must consider these aspects and understand the learners' needs and therefore develop

classroom inclusion practices to achieve learning outcomes for all children, including children with restricted abilities of the average student to deliberately create curricula, instruction and assessments that take into account the range of diversity that exists due to disabilities, communication impairments, and intellectual diversity inherent in heterogeneous classes, practices and assessments to fairly and equally suit each student's learning needs (Lotan, 2006).

Principles of Inclusive Teaching-Learning

The principles of inclusive teaching-learning are based on the notion that all children, regardless of their ability or disability, socio-cultural background, religion/caste and/or gender must be given equal opportunities to learn under the same roof. There are two important aspects to inclusive teaching-learning:

1. Intelligence is dynamic and shaped by cultural expectations, experiences, capabilities, languages, values, perceptions, motives, emotions and interpersonal behavior.
2. Learning is not only an individual psychological process, but also a social one. It includes interactions between children, between children and teachers/adults, and their environment including resources.

Thus, the following eight principles are essential for teachers to create an inclusive teaching-learning environment in the classrooms-

1. Students with varying abilities, values, talents, learning styles, social backgrounds, and personal histories must be respected and appreciated.

2. Specific needs or additional academic concerns of students must be identified and be timely responded by taking necessary action.
3. A friendly learning environment must be created in the classroom that makes learning a joyful experience for ALL children including children with disabilities.
4. Flexible and varied teaching methods must be used based on the students' learning pace and style.
5. Use universal design principles to create accessible classes.
6. Educational technology must be effectively integrated to facilitate teaching-learning and assistive technology must be used to meet the special needs of children with disabilities.
7. Efforts must be made to reduce the barriers that obstruct the smooth functioning of the teaching-learning process.
8. Optimum level of achievement must be expected from all the students including children with disabilities.

Good Pedagogical Practices for Inclusive Teaching-Learning

The above-mentioned principles would serve the purpose of making the teaching-learning process inclusive only if they are put to practice. Corresponding to the principles mentioned above, following are some of the good practices for inclusive teaching-learning-

1. **Respecting learners with different abilities, values, talents, learning styles, social backgrounds and personal histories**-Following

questions must be considered in this regard-

- Can the background and experience influence the motivation, engagement and learning of students in your classroom?
- How can you modify course materials, assignments and tests to make them more accessible to all students in your class?
- What strategies must be adopted to be proactive in understanding your students?
- How to incorporate diversity into your overall curriculum?

2. Identifying and responding to the specific needs or additional learning objectives and providing required resources- This could be achieved by the use of Braille, alternative communication methods such as parallel sign language, and other ICT-based teaching methods to support children with disabilities.

3. Creating a supportive learning environment that promotes the learning of ALL children, including children with disabilities- Asking questions to students and also encouraging them to ask questions is the most suitable practice for this. Questions are very important for communication and encourage participation of all children. Many children would take

time and seek a safe environment to be comfortable to ask questions.

4. Using flexible and varied teaching methods based on students' learning pace and style- The following practices could be put to use:

- Using a variety of instructional strategies, exercises and activities that are tailored to the needs of learners with different learning styles, abilities, experiences and knowledge. It provides flexibility in how learners demonstrate their knowledge and how their knowledge and development are assessed.
- Evidence of learning in student's preferred style: Giving opportunities to students to present evidence of what they are learning in their own ways would be a fruitful practice to assess students' learning. For example, an oral explanation of a student's language would be sufficient enough for many to understand; students who prefer to draw can depict what they are learning in graphic forms; students who are more hands-on could create models, etc.
- A multi-sensory approach to teaching-learning would also aid in serving the purpose.

- Encouragement for teamwork-Flexibility and diversity in grouping ensures that students would work together to create something interesting and meaningful. Delegating teamwork is difficult and requires careful planning. Teachers must develop tasks for the teams, then decide the size and nature of the team, prepare the required resources, and think about their own roles that they would play while students are engaged in teamwork.

5. Use generic design principles to create accessible classes- This could be done in the following manner:

- Using the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with three different points of access to the curriculum: content, process and product. Content refers to what is being taught or what we want students to learn, know, and do. Learning process refers to how students understand what they are learning. And the products of student success are how students demonstrate what they have learned (Tomlinson, 1995).

6. Use of assistive technology and devices- Teachers should ensure that

children with disabilities have access to technology and assistive devices according to their needs, ensuring maximum participation in social life and education. Examples: ICT, communication devices, mobility aids, and teaching aids such as Braille, abacus, etc. Assistive devices can make differently-abled students feel confident and acknowledged in a regular classroom.

7. Lowering Barriers in the learning environment- All stakeholders of education must work together to identify and reduce barriers in inclusive education.

8. High expectations from all students including children with disabilities- Building a culture of high expectations begins with an accessible curriculum together with meaningful and relevant learning experiences. It is important that teachers and parents start with the idea that with the right educational support every student can succeed.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 views teaching as a dynamic and social activity. It aims to develop inclusive teaching-learning and meaningful learning experiences for children while trying to break away from the textbook culture (NCERT, 2005). It also highlights fundamental changes in the way we think about students and the learning process. In the light of NCF 2005, the child-centered pedagogy is one way of prioritizing the experience, voice and active participation of

the child. This pedagogy requires teachers to plan teaching according to the child's psychological development, interests, and sociological background.

Conclusion

The good pedagogical practices for inclusive education are important for both- academic and social contexts as they set the stage for interactive dialogue as well as for appreciating diversity that contributes to the creation of equal opportunities and the development of an appropriate school ecology for inclusive education. Teachers have to play a key role in making the teaching-learning process more inclusive as they are the ones who, after parents, are most closely related to children. And hence, teachers are majorly responsible for children's sociological, psychological and emotional well-being as well as for their scholastic and co-scholastic achievements. If children feel heard and acknowledged in the classroom, they are most likely to perform to the best of their capabilities. All they need is the right guidance and motivation from someone (mostly teachers) who would believe in them and their abilities. All this would become easier for teachers to achieve if they use the right kind of pedagogical practices facilitated by their skills and competencies.

References

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