

MANAGING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Inclusion is an approach in education which seeks to provide a school environment that is conducive to participation of all learners, where all children from different background could learn successfully. Hence, the article contains a broader examination of issues on: The concept of inclusive education, the Inclusive school, Management of inclusive education schools. A perspective on managing inclusive education schools. Teaching strategies for teaching learners with special learning needs.

Introduction

In almost every country, children and adults with special need conditions are being 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 rates, styles and backgrounds. In a gesture of sympathy some children with special needs are sorted out into categories and placed in separate special schools settings, away from their peers. This has led to the development of two separate systems of education within countries (i.e. regular and special education). However, in recent years the rationale for having two parallel national systems of education has been castigated 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.

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 expended and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities (Article3.1) UNESCO, 1998:3)

In Spite of the 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). Attempts have been made in literatures to distinguish integration from inclusion (e.g. Donna 1996), such in most cases only reveal that whatever differences that might exists is insignificant and, in most cases

boarders on meanings. Integration or mainstreaming demands that “additional arrangements will be made to accommodate” pupils with disabilities “within a system of schooling that remains largely uncharged”. Inclusive education, on the other hand, aims to restructure schools in order to respond to the learning needs of all children (Ainscow, 1995:1). Hence, integration calls for separate arrangements in the regular schools for exceptional children, mainly those traditionally labeled as disabled, through such practices as withdrawal, remedial education and /or mainstreaming. However, inclusive schooling, in the first instance, recognizes that special learning needs can arise from social, psychological, economics, linguistic, cultural as well as physical (or disability) factors, hence the use of the term “children with special needs” rather than “children with disabilities”. Likewise, it recognizes that any child can experience difficulty in learning, either short-term or long term, as such school must continually review itself to meet the needs of all its learners.

The Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusion is a step further in mainstreaming. It is the principle applied to accommodate /include all human beings, thus the full spectrum of diverse abilities, with one system, in such a manner that all involved can be assured of successful, equal and quality participation in real-life experiences from birth to death. This implies that all have to perceive and treat themselves and others as dignified human beings in enhancing human potential maximally and in succeeding to achieve whatever outcome is envisaged and humanly possible” (Burden, 200:29).

Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of ‘integration and ‘mainstreaming’ which ended to be concerned principally with disability and special educational needs and implied learners changing or becoming ready for accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child’s right to participate and the school’s duty to accept the child. The new programme rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities.

Inclusive education retains most of the essential characteristics of mainstreaming as a programme for accessing special needs children education in the regular school. The commonalities between them are many special need children are instructed in the regular class, the regular teacher plays a key role in instructing the children, curriculum adaptation is made to match the needs of the children etc. (Ozaji, 2005). None the less a closer look at the two programmes will show differences between them scholars are of the view that inclusive education is not equal to integrated education. This integration calls for separate arrangements in the regular school for exceptional children, mainly those traditionally labeled as disabled, through such practices as withdrawal, remedial education and /or mainstreaming. While inclusive schooling in the first instance, recognizes that special learning needs can arise from social psychological, economics, 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

recognizes that any child can experience difficulty 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.

In a nutshell, inclusive education framework adopted at the Salamanca conference in 1994 states that:

..... Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, Intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. (Article 3, Salamanca framework for action)

UNESCO (1979) Comments that:

Concurrently, inclusive education is a transverse issue which cuts across all education initiatives from early childhood education to primary education, vocational education adult education teacher education and curriculum development as well as in spheres related to culture and social development.

The Inclusive School

An Inclusive schooling is one that accepts inclusion as a necessary means of providing for the learning needs of children in an environment that take into cognizance of diversity. It call for a restricting of the school to accommodate all learners and advocate radical changes to the curriculum, claiming that current curricular were perpetuating exclusion, dividing those learners who could meet their objectives as they are from those who could not (Ainscow, 1991; Jenkinson, 1997).

Research on inclusive schooling has focused on 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 teachers were very willing to take on the responsibility for special needs children, but were not confident of the skills to carry out that task. Most teachers felt they needed training in the special needs fields. These findings imply the need for rigorous in-service training for regular classroom teachers through workshops, seminars, conferences etc. 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 adequately 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).

Between 1988 and 1993, the project teams met, trailed 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 Classrooms A Teacher Guide (Ainscow, 1994) and two videos, inclusive schooling and training videos. These materials have been highly beneficial in improving schooling practice, giving skills 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 the special 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, psychological, economic and physical conditions.

At the end of the conference, the Salamanca statement and framework for Action was unanimously adopted by acclamation (UNESCO, 1994). Different countries, regional, local communities and professionals are at different levels of conceptualization. While some are at the inclusive school for all stage, others are at the special school stage (which is restrictive and segregators) and still others somewhere in-between.

Management of Inclusive Education Schools

Managing inclusive and Special Educational Needs (SEN) is a continuing challenge for the educational community irrespective of location (special, primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education). The task identified in this sub-section of this chapter is to integrate professional knowledge and mapping of an intellectual terrain in the management of inclusive learning. The major implications emerging from this sub-section of the chapter are to do with how to manage in order to enable learning and teaching for all pupils and students regardless of individual differences or social diversity.

Leadership and Management for Learning

A core function of educational policy is the effective organization of knowledge management and learning managers and leaders in education are people who take on a particular role in making all of this happen. It is worth noting that this work is done by people, with people and for people. In the task of managing inclusive and special education integrating the educative process (teaching and learning) within a specific context is the entire basis for realizing success, achieving quality, producing knowledge in learning leadership. The work of an educational leader or manager in the contemporary context of the knowledge society has been typically presented as an individual determining strategic direction, performance focused and acting as an agent of transformational change. This sits uneasily alongside the notion of a head teacher engaged in facilitating professional learning and knowledge creation. It is also a description of leadership in which making sense and educative endeavour are not emphasized. Bush and Bell (2002:4) state that:

..... three levels of management, strategic, organizational and operational must work in harmony towards common purpose Each level of management depends upon the other two. Organizational and operational management can be aimless without clear values and purposes but even the most inspiring leadership will fail if it

does not lead to effective implementation. Combining these three levels is the prime function of management.

This function when working well produces knowledge, facilitates personal growth, professional development, celebrates achievement, values the individual person and is set against the backdrop of life-long learning. It is by definition about educating and providing an education for all.

A Perspective on Managing Inclusive Education in the Classrooms.

Inclusive education as a latest programme in special needs education challenges the assumption that most people have about the purpose of education and the process of education and teaching. According to Van Zyl (2002: 112) inclusive education is much more than merely changing the curriculum, as a result the need for educators to have an opportunity to learn, reflect and discover new ways of thinking. For the successful management of inclusive education, educators need to be supported in the development of new skills and effective practices for their classrooms and schools. Hence, this sub-heading will try to examine the competencies that teachers need to manage their inclusive schools, effective teaching strategies, skills and knowledge on how to address or remove barriers that affect students learning.

Teacher Competencies Needed to Manage Inclusive Classrooms.

The teacher occupies an important position in the teaching and learning enterprise. It is generally believed that educators, more than any other school personnel determines the nature and extent of learning achievement in schools. As important as they are in the successful implementation of an inclusive education policy, their competencies in this field are of utmost importance. Hence, teachers need training about inclusive principles and the basics of disability to ensure that their attitudes and approaches do not prevent disabled children from gaining equal access to the curriculum. Training should be ongoing provided in short courses (or modules) and should take place within a local school environment preferably their own school. Training should take place at both pre-service and in-service stages.

Thompson (2001) emphasized that "...the effective implementation of inclusive education depends on the high quality of professional preparation of teachers at pre and in-service levels to equip them for and update their knowledge and skill in meeting the needs and aspirations of a diverse school population". Bothma et.al (2000) argued that originally teachers had a negative attitude towards inclusive due to the fact that they were not trained to cope with learners who experienced barriers to learning and that their schools did not have the facilities or equipment needed by these learners. Schools need restructuring and educators need in-service training for a successful inclusive school to become a possibility. Hence, educators who are willing to pursue their skills-development need to be trained in a range of issues so that their contribution could be of value. Swart (2001) warned that even though inclusive education has become a

prominent item on the international educational agenda and has provided a framework for recognizing diversity and providing quality education for all learners within an inclusive education system it has fallen prey to a lot of castigation. He argued that educators are under a lot of stress because they are not acquainted with the principles and management of inclusion. For the teachers to succeed in an inclusive school environment, he/she will need:

- Orientation on inclusive education and the paradigm shift from the medical model to a human rights model of learner with special educational needs.
- To grasp the full meaning and understands the demands of its application in the school.
- Have positive attitude towards inclusion as an educational programme.
- Management training in inclusive education for principals and other education personnel.
- Training on how to adapt the curriculum to the individual learner's need.
- Recognizes and accepts diversity
- Methods and models of inclusive practice.
- Educators should be trained as a resource, rather than the sole source of knowledge in the school.
- To accept that everyone in the school is his/her responsibility rather than assuming someone else will do it.

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