

Towards Inclusive Education: Overcoming Implicit Bias of General Education Teachers

Dr. Rekha

Assistant Professor, Saint Kabir College Of Education, Kauli, Patiala (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 25 May 2019

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Implicit Bias, Children with Special Educational Needs..

ABSTRACT

Inclusive Education described by Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) refers to a schooling in which all the children including the ones with special needs have access to regular class rooms with the help of adequate support. Inclusion in education means that the students having special needs spend most of their time with the non-disabled students, considered normal by the society. Inclusivity refers not only to physical and cognitive disabilities but also to the full range of human diversity including ability, language, age, culture, gender and other human differences. Although there is a wide spread support for the policy of inclusion but it seems difficult to implement it due to the lack of an overall level of acceptance of inclusive education among general-education teachers. Learning to live together, one of the agendas of Delor's commission, could not be achieved unless the teachers as well as the students of the mainstream schools learn to live with the children having special needs and are ready to accept them as one of their co-citizens in society. This paper seeks to discuss the bias of general education teachers towards the children with special needs. Some inclusive pedagogy practices for the successful inclusion of the entire class would also be discussed.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education refers to an academic system that allows children with special needs to be included in mainstream classes alongside their peers. Every child has different abilities. They learn in different ways as well as at a different pace. An environment which is inclusive, learning-friendly and barrier-free should therefore be created in every school and community so that all children are enabled to develop their academic, social, emotional and physical potentials to the maximum as they all come to learn to live together. Without access to comprehensive support system, many children with different needs either never enroll in schools, or drop out, or stay in the school but are prevented from achieving their full potential. Majority of children with special needs in developing countries are out of schools. Many of those enrolled are in special schools away from their friends and peers as well as their families. For Florian (2008), inclusive education endeavors that more and more children with different needs must get enrolled in the regular schools where they play, learn and grow up with their non-disabled peers. Inclusion involves use of supportive ways in which teachers respond to the individual differences during whole class teaching along with mobilizing support from the parents, the community and the special schools wherever required. Rouse (2008) indicated that inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating a space in which all the children can learn and can feel that they belong to it. The teacher's role becomes crucial in promoting participation and reducing under achievement, particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning. The teacher's role is not only to teach the subject but also to prepare teaching material according to the needs of disabled children. Teachers have direct interaction with students and play a significant role in determining student's everyday experience in the classroom. Along with most of the physical barriers the human mind usually depends

on unconscious mental shortcuts and generalizations to get through the day. We all have biases of one form or the other. Teachers need to attend to their own bias, which will be a step in the right direction for the inclusion of all the students.

2. Teachers' Bias towards Inclusive Education

Inclusive education treats all pupils as individuals while recognizing that their individuality is to be appreciated and respected. NCF (2010) insists that, for achieving a cohesive society, it is essential to respond to the specific educational needs of the learners from different sections of the society. Along with intervention of other stakeholders, a general teacher plays a very significant role in achieving inclusion in classroom. From a survey conducted on general education teachers, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) pointed out that only two-third of the teachers had positive attitude towards basic idea of inclusion. A very small majority expressed readiness to accept children with special educational needs into their classrooms. de Boer et.al. (2011) stated that overall acceptance of inclusion has not grown and the positive response towards the idea could not exceed seventy percent. Baker and Zigmond (1990) pointed out that the general classroom was a place where undifferentiated, large group instruction dominated and the teachers were more concerned with maintaining routine rather than responding to the individual differences. They argued that, though the teachers cared about children and were also conscientious about their jobs, yet their mindset as well as their behavior was in accordance with the socially accepted dominant conventions. In this stereotyped setting, a student who could not conform was likely to be unsuccessful. Implicit social cognition of the teachers affects their understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner. Saloviita and Schaffus (2016) Along with lack of other resources like administrative support, adapted study material and classroom assistance, a teacher's biased behavior affects

the inclusion of the children adversely. The teacher's claim of lack of resources might just be a socially adaptable excuse for not admitting children with special educational needs into their classrooms.

3. Implicit Bias of General Education Teachers

An Implicit bias is an unconscious association, belief or attitude towards any social group. The human mind depends on the unconscious mental shortcuts and generalization, and, regularly does heuristic thinking to get through the day. For example, a grey sky probably means rain, so one better carries an umbrella. However, when such shortcuts get related to certain identity groups, they can be dangerous. For example a teacher may have a picture in his/her mind of a good student or a bad student, without even realizing it. Completely unintentionally and even unconsciously, a teacher would think of any student that the he/she will create nuisance in class. Due to implicit bias a teacher may often attribute certain qualities or characteristics to all the students belonging to a particular group. These types of implicit biases may get attached to a race, nationality, class, religion, gender, any physical or mental disability, or any of the other identity-related categories. This can lead to the creation of an environment that is not equally conducive to learning for all the students in the class.

It is quite natural that we all have biases of one form or another. It is not important to know who is biased and who is not; but it is important to know about the biases one has, and what he/she is going to do in order to overcome those biases. Knowing that you have biases is the first step towards overcoming them. One cannot seek to change an implicit bias unless one knows that he or she possesses it.

4. Overcoming the Implicit Bias of Teachers

There is always hope for changing the biases that we all have. Our minds are malleable. Just as we learn our biases over time, we can change them with intention and motivation. We can do so by having a meaningful relationship with the people who are different from us and engaging in practice to be more mindful. Lots of different practices can help. All the practices must help the teacher to think consciously about his/her approach to the classroom so that the bias can be countered before it sets in. Some of the possible practices are discussed here with.

- A teacher must take proper time to ask himself/herself some questions before entering the classroom. Like: what kind of diversity he/she is likely to encounter in

his/her class; what kind of perception he/she has about the diverse groups to be encountered in the class; and whether he/she is vulnerable to any of the preconceptions that he/she has.

- Before leaving the class room, in order to verify his/her preconceptions, a teacher must collect information directly from the students in class by using different means about performance and backgrounds of various students.
- A teacher must try to know his/her students as individuals through conversation before, during and after the class room session.
- A teacher must prepare and use 'if-then' strategies in order to think ahead of a possible encounter, and plan how he/she is going to behave in that situation.
- A teacher may use counter-stereo-typing-imaging i.e. if a teacher discovers that he/she is entertaining some biased generalized notion about certain category of people, he/she should actively imagine examples of people who contradict those stereo-types.
- A teacher should be well rested and not tired when interacting with diverse group of students, because when tired, people are more prone to lean on assumptions and short cuts leading to the biased behavior.
- A teacher should encourage and engage students in active learning in the classroom. Active learning involves students in the production of knowledge and this tends to equalize them regardless of their background and previous experiences.
- A teacher must remind himself/herself about the general pedagogical principles, like the imperative to educate all the students, to treat the students as individuals, and to have a growth mind set believing that the student's abilities, interests and capacities can change.

5. Conclusion

By overcoming his/her own biases, a teacher can stop judging some students as 'less-able'. Without denying differences between the learners, a teacher seeks to accommodate them by extending to all, what is ordinarily available, thereby celebrating individual differences without any discrimination. In this way, by attending to his/her own biases, a teacher can move in the right direction—the direction of education for all and promoting learning to live together.

References

1. Baker, J.M., & Zigmond, N. (1990) Are regular education classes equipped to accommodate students with learning disabilities? *Exceptional children*, 56, 515-526.
2. de Boer, A., Pijl, S.J., & Minnaert, A. (2011) Regular Classroom School Teacher's Attitude towards inclusive education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 331-353. doi: 10.1080/13603110903030089.
3. Florian, L. (2008) "Special or Inclusive Education: Future Trends." *British Journal of Special Education*, (4), 202-208.
4. National Council for Teacher Education (2010) *National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education*. New Delhi: NCTE.
5. Rouse, M. (2008) "Developing Inclusive Practice: A Role for Teachers and Teacher Education." *Education in the North*, 16(1), 6-13.
6. Saloviita, T., Schaffus, T. (2016) Teacher Attitude towards inclusive education in Finland and Brandenburg, Germany, and the issue of extra work. *European Journal of Special Education*, (4), 202-208.

- Education*, 31(4), 458-471. doi: 10.1080/08856257.2016.1194569.
7. Scruggs, T.E., & Mastropieri, M.A. (1996) Teacher Perceptions of Mainstreaming Inclusion 1958-1995: A research synthesis, *Exceptional Children*, 63 (1), 59-74.
 8. UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Salamanca: World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality