

## Option For Educational Facilities For Children With Visual Impairment

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Generally, children with visual impairment are grouped under disabled or challenged children, who need to be attended to with a separate focus perspective and efforts. Realizing the importance of integrating these children under the mainstream, efforts have been made under the centrally sponsored IED programme to educate such children, especially at the primary schools through specially trained teachers in such schools. Under this programme, the special teachers receive special salary benefit and children receive books, uniforms, and allowances for medical, hostel, transport, equipment etc.

The UN-ESCAP Decade of the disabled (1993-2002) indicated that the countries in the region should make Education for All for disabled children a reality by 2002, implying that all the member countries including India should achieve literacy rate on par with that of non-disabled children by 2002. This target has still remained a utopian dream. Efforts should be made to provide secondary education to more number of children with disabilities. Along with efforts to achieve universalisation of elementary education by 2010 by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), efforts are also being made to universalize secondary education (CABE Committee Report, June 2005). The CABE committee advocates the need for a paradigm shift in the conceptual design of secondary education and suggests four guiding principles on which universal secondary education can be built. 'Universal access', being one of the principles, suggests that solving the problem of providing access at the physical level alone for the child with disability or a child from deprived background or a girl child without a change in the mind sets of the classmates, teachers and the curriculum planners or text book writers would be inadequate.

The school should be able to create a new cultural ambience and a child friendly curriculum. Another principle related to equality and social justice suggests that the school system will have to strive for six dimensions of equality and social justice namely; a) gender, b) economic disparity, c) social i.e.; SC and ST, d) cultural (including the issues of religious and linguistic diversity, e) rural-urban. These need to be reflected in the curriculum to build up the self esteem of each child so as to ensure that all children are able to complete secondary education. While discussing the

quality of secondary education, the CABE Report suggests the need for paradigm shift in the conceptualization of secondary education from mugging up of a few content items or writing examination to school as a holistic living experience, whereby it is more inclusive to allow every child the right to exercise his/her full potential and achieve excellence.

Adequate opportunity must be offered for exercising varieties of intelligence expressed in the concept of multiple intelligence and unfolding the full potential in each child. The different types of intelligence including linguistic and verbal intelligence, logical - mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily kinaesthetic or sport intelligence, intra-personal intelligence and naturalist and environmental intelligence need to be nurtured.

All the above thinking related to universalisation of elementary education suggests that disabled children are not to be discriminated from non-disabled children. Both have to be treated at par in all walks of life. The disabled children are not charitable objects but as productive members of the society as non-disabled counterparts. A change in the approach in education and inclusion of 'disabled children' in the society should start from the primary level itself and continue at the secondary level and beyond. International declarations on special education point out that disabled children should be included in general education. The general educators should be concerned about disabled children as much as special educators. An inclusive education means creating conducive learning environments for all.

Focusing on visual impaired children, one would like to examine the question 'whether they are disabled at all'? The concept of disability is a relative term. It is a context of a group of members with respect to a specific factor. An individual in a group can become disabled on any factor but not disabled on some other factor. Further, the concept of disability connotes a negative note, whereas the concept of ability connotes a positive note. Again, the contextual factors in the society make one individual as disabled non-disabled. Hence, the same contextual factor/factors should be adapted to suit the needs of the individual to make him/her non disabled. If one examines the percentage of dropout of children from normal school at the end of

elementary stage and secondary stage which is about 50% and 60%. Such children who drop out are they not disabled, if they come out with no minimum literacy, numeracy and vocational skill? This situation emerges when instruction and curriculum is not differentiated according to the differential needs of children. When the principle of 'One suit fits all' is applied, everybody will be disabled except for the one who fits into the suit. In other words, the instruction, curriculum, examination system, the infrastructural facilities etc., in a school system should cater to the needs of all types of children so that nobody is branded 'disabled'. This is what is implied by 'inclusive' education. Some of the adaptations need to be more specially designed with visual impaired children. It may not be appropriate to bracket them as children with disability (physical and mental) as mentioned in CABE committee report.

Except the sensory handicap in visual, they are normal or more than normal than children without such handicap. Because the methods of teaching, examination and instructional materials are all verbal oriented and demand acquisition of lot of words by children with or without meaning, visual impaired children find it difficult to adapt to the learning environment and opportunity created by the teacher along with children without visual impairment. The visual impaired children may not require a change in the curriculum, by they require adaptations in the methods of presentations, display, content etc. that will enhance learning.

Such approach helps children with visual impairment as well as who have learning problems without any visual impairment. May be more use of non-verbal communication helps both children with or without visual impairment. Suitable communication and instructional strategies which promote the independence of these children are required. Visual impaired children find it difficult to communicate at the secondary level due to the absence of a uniform sign language and also due to the limited vocabulary in the existing sign language documents.

Arpan Vidyalaya, Rohtak has developed a comprehensive sign language dictionary covering 1,800 words and phrases (Mani, 2002). Such efforts help in providing these children with equal educational expe-

rience. Once these children are able to acquire the basic concepts through their minimum vocabulary and able to learn independently employing information technology for the educational enrichment of these children, goes a long way in reducing the gap between the visual impaired and the normal children. Once the threshold is reached, they will be able to manage their learning themselves. This principle in teaching is in no way different from that which need to be adapted for children without any visual impairment because in the present social and educational context with knowledge explosion and technological advancement the role of the teacher is not information giver with verbalism rather is facilitator who promotes learning by creating suitable learning environment differentiated for different types of learners. She/ he is a manager of learning environment, allowing children to learn on their own and construct knowledge for themselves, as all of know that it is the learner who should participate in the learning process which can only be induced by the teacher from outside.

To conclude, some principles are suggested here:

\*Visual impaired children are to be treated at par with children without visual impairment in all walks of life. A new cultural ambience should be created with changed mindset to treat all children alike.

\*Differentiated instructional methods and materials are to be provided for children with different learning needs, thus ensuring equality and social justice.

\*The curriculum should be child friendly and build up the self esteem of each child.

\*Adequate opportunity should be provide for nurturing multiple intelligence, leading to unfolding of full potential in each student.

\*The teacher should focus on information processing, rather than information giving; play a facilitator's role in the classroom by providing suitable learning environments to all types of children with different background and sensory capabilities, so as to make each child construct his/her own learning in a joyful child-friendly situation.

\*The four pillars of learning suggested by International Education Commission 1996 namely; learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be should form the bases of curriculum and instruction.

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