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Ideals and Realities of Inclusive Pedagogy-
An Autoethnographic Reflection

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an autoethnographic reflection of my inclusive practices during the fifteen years of my teaching experience as a teacher while an elementary teacher trainer. By reflecting and analysing through my critical incidents in the chapter “My Classroom Journeys” I tried to explore my differentiated strategies that I chose to support disabled children in order to reduce their learning barriers. In this study, I explored my attitudinal changes from a regular teacher to more an inclusive teacher. My attitude changed into an inclusive teacher. I noted my struggles in the classroom and the way I overcame them in the form of anecdotes. These anecdotes helped to solidify my ideas. My incidents most often were concerned with students’ understanding, classroom management, assessment, student behaviour, relationships with students, and student motivation. Real classrooms are no longer a homogeneous group because every child is different. Disability studies empowered me to have more awareness about the ideological aspects of inclusive pedagogy which I described in chapter 6. In this chapter I added the ‘Realities of My Inclusive Pedagogy’. Here I tried to uncover the genuineness of my classroom environment in the form of barriers that I experienced as an inclusive teacher while implementing my differentiated strategies. I hope that this study can increase our knowledge and understanding of the realities of inclusive pedagogy in the Indian context and it revealed the barriers that are affecting disabled children and their supports when they are in inclusive classrooms. I also hope that by telling my stories, the readers of this autoethnography, particularly the teaching community, can connect and slowly change their perceptions towards disabled children more positively in the inclusive classroom with the overall goal of removing existing barriers.

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CHAPTER 1: PREAMBLE

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education and its pedagogy in India, faces challenges connected to its ideals and actions. The ideal elements of inclusion involve the right to education for all students. Inclusive education values diversity and the unique contributions each student brings to the classroom. In a truly inclusive setting, every child feels safe and has a sense of belonging. Students and their parents participate in inclusive settings, learning goals and take part in decisions that affect them. Inclusive teachers need training, support, flexibility, and resources to nurture, encourage, and respond to the needs of all students. The values associated with inclusion have links to interactionist ideology and revolve around fellowship, participation, democratization, benefit, accessibility, quality, equity and justice. Inclusive pedagogy at its core is learner-centered and equity-focused, creating an overarching learning environment in which students feel equally included. Inclusive pedagogy believes that every child's capacity to learn is changeable. What teachers choose to do (or not to do) in the present situation can alter a child's learning capacity for the future. The definitions of inclusion given by different international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, have several common ideal elements (Hardy and Woodcock, 2015). Inclusive pedagogy involves the instructional strategies and methodologies for all students with equal rights (Booth, 1996). As Allan (2008) has concluded:

“There appears, however, to be deep uncertainty about how to create inclusive pedagogical environments within schools and about how to approach students those who are in different needs.”

(p.14) From my years of teaching experience in India, I had observed the gap between formulations and realizations of inclusive pedagogical aspects.

PREFACE OF THE STUDY

The concept of inclusion in general education classrooms has become increasingly popular over the years. This is an important subject. It is academically very relevant. It has some controversies. As an educator, I am interested in classroom dynamics and the ways in which students can perform at their maximum potential. My stories of teaching life in elementary classrooms start from a remote village of Kerala in India. I wish to present my personal experiences, a mixture of failure and success, pain and relief, twists and turns that help the reader to start reviewing their own stories and experiences, and then may begin reflective practices in their classroom teaching and research.

Over the past fifteen years of my teaching career, I have made tremendous changes in my pedagogy. Initially, I did not understand how children learn and how their learning could be enhanced. I was simply a transmitter of knowledge. My approach was more formal procedural and one-way traffic in which students had rare chances to learn from themselves and interact with me in the classroom. In 1999 when I completed my Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) degree in mathematics education, I had some idea about methods of teaching and studied Bloom's taxonomy of behavioral objectives during the learning process. The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, known as Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, & Krathwohl, 1956) is one

of the most recognized learning theories in the field of education. It is a classification system used to explain different levels of human cognition—i.e., thinking, learning, and understanding.

In addition, I was impressed by Piaget's theory of learning. Developmental psychology was my guiding principle of teaching and learning. Gagne, Ausubel, Bruner and Bandura's learning theories had been involved in my pedagogical practices. Piaget's theory was dominant during my studies. Soon after obtaining my B. Ed degree, I started teaching in a private elementary school. Throughout the first year of my teaching career, my routine pedagogy continued as outlined above. I did not let my students ask questions, encourage them to do group work or cooperative learning. The classroom was under my full control and the students were passive listeners and copiers. I considered myself the source of all knowledge. I was a transmitter of knowledge and they were the receivers. Students were evaluated based on the final examinations.

In 2001, as part of my Master's of Education, I had a practicum to observe classes in two special schools for disabled students. Before this, like many of my colleagues, I believed that students with additional learning needs were often more effectively catered to in special educational settings. I believed that the teachers who worked in special school settings would have superior knowledge, teaching skills and expertise in teaching students with additional learning needs that regular classroom teachers did not have. During my visits to these special schools my observation of teachers, students and classroom management approaches, made me rethink how important the role that the regular classroom teachers should play, in teaching students with different learning needs. I quickly realized that effective teaching and learning

transcends not only age differences, but also the levels and type of student need. I understood the need for regular classroom teachers to be equipped with a wide range of relevant knowledge and skills that enable them to address differing student needs. Diversity and innovation are part of everyday classrooms. Observing teaching practices in special school classrooms, has heightened my awareness of strategies for regular classrooms.

After completing my studies, I continued my career as an elementary teacher and was at the same time an elementary teacher trainer in the same institution. From 2003 onward, my school offered full inclusion, for students from transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. I had serious doubts about this full inclusion model. I wondered whether or not it was possible to meet the needs of all students in one classroom community. I was concerned that disabled students might not receive all the services and supports they needed. I was also worried about gifted students—would they be properly challenged or would they disappear in such an environment? The first few months were difficult because I faced the most diverse group of students I had ever taught.

I had a new student who previously attended with the small group of disabled students and this was his first time in a general education setting. Initially he struggled a lot with boundary issues, socialization and had very little experience for communicating with his peers.

There were times I felt frustrated with how to help each student succeed. I prepared and implemented an Individual Education Programme (IEP) with the help of a resource teacher. I considered him as a unique child with different needs, gave him personal space and time, to

participate in small group activities. Gradually he came out of his shell and started to interact with his peers.

Still, I remember an incident which happened in my student teacher's practicum class in grade 4.

My student teacher conducted a competitive multiplication game with her students. The children took turns to represent their row. When the game began, the competing students stood at the back of the classroom, next to their row of desks. They were required to call out the answer to each multiplication question. The child that gave the quickest correct answer stepped forward; the child who first reached the front of the room was the winner. One of the children in the class had a disability, which I now recognise as cerebral palsy. He was able to compete academically with the other students and he was able to work out the answers, but was unable to respond and call out quickly. When it was his turn to compete and represent 'his row', I watched his face after each question he was asked, as his teammates groaned after each answer he missed, and I saw the hurt and the embarrassment that he was subjected to.

No effort was made to support this boy. Minor modifications such as restructuring the rules of the game in order to include every one without any hesitation would have allowed him to participate successfully. The teacher seemed oblivious to not only the injustice of the way the game was conducted, but also the fact that it highlighted the student's disability and set him apart from his peers. Reflecting on my time with this class, I realize that observing this teacher's practice had an immense impact on me. On the very next day I presented the same incident in my

teacher education class and conducted a group discussion regarding how can we accommodate that disabled child in the same game strategy. Through this activity I tried to ignite the minds of my future student teachers regarding effective inclusion. Even at this early stage in my teacher training, this negative modelling, made me aware of the impact teachers can have on students' academic performance. It can also adversely affect their morale, self-confidence and participation. This incident made me aware of the importance of observing and monitoring each student's face, body language and emotional responses to various situations and not just their work habits and academic results.

This early classroom experience taught me that exclusion and discrimination can happen in many forms and the physical presence of students in a classroom does not equate with ideals of inclusive pedagogical practices. Presence in the class does not mean the disabled student is equally involved in the learning activities. The above learning activity portrayed how the child with cerebral palsy was marginalized in class. Equally and importantly, my observations of my student teacher's practices developed my awareness of ways that teachers can contribute to the marginalisation and exclusion of students. Sometimes my student teachers were not able to accommodate the different learners in their classroom activities, which automatically excluded the disabled child from their learning strategies.

The prime motivator of this study is my classroom experiences and observations of students during my career as a primary teacher and at the same time as a teacher trainer. It relates to the development of my understanding about the ways that teachers' pedagogical choices can enhance, or impede, the participation and learning of individual students, or groups of students.

This study is a synthesis of knowledge from my experience in an inclusive pedagogical environment.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to analyze the challenges and the struggles that I faced in the elementary classroom while realizing inclusive pedagogy. By reviewing my own reflections and anecdotes I would be able to explore the differential learning strategies that I adopted in my inclusive classroom to support disabled children to reduce their learning barriers. Furthermore, this study highlights the gap between ideals and realities of inclusive pedagogy in the Indian context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From my own pedagogical experience, I have seen an increasing number of challenges that make it difficult to address each student's readiness level and distinctive learning style in an inclusive classroom. Accommodating each student's unique capabilities and needs requires differentiated instruction, which can be difficult to achieve. Based on this experience, the research questions for this study are:

What changes, if any, have I seen from my classroom experience, while adopting differential learning strategies to support disabled children in order to reduce their learning barriers?

SUB-QUESTIONS

- How does my own pedagogical experience in an inclusive classroom give an insight into the barriers that disabled children face in relation to the learning environment?
- Within my experience, what are the barriers that impede the realization of inclusive pedagogy in Indian elementary classrooms?
- Within my stories, how do the differential learning strategies that influence the children with different needs reduce their learning barriers?

OBJECTIVES

- To reflect the major challenges which I have seen while implementing inclusive pedagogy in the elementary classroom.
- To address the different barriers that disabled children face in relation to the learning environment.
- To analyze the reason behind the learning barriers through a disability lens.
- To provide insight and suggestions from my classroom experience while adopting differential learning strategies to support children with disabilities, in order to reduce their barriers.

In this research, I explore my pedagogical experiences, through the data which are the ultimate source of information for me, to know the context of teaching disabled children in the regular classroom environment. I have experienced different issues and challenges in my

inclusive pedagogy that have been closely observed concerning how I used inclusive pedagogy for various learning situations in the elementary classroom at different times of need. I have followed an autoethnographic method of inquiry.

In 2005, as part of my in-service training, I had an opportunity to participate in a teacher's enrichment program conducted by the Association of Learning Disabilities India (ALDI). There was great discussion about the concepts of the social model of disability and the need to change the attitude of teachers towards disabled children. After this program, whenever I was in classroom, I would ask myself a silent question that "If I cannot learn the way you teach me, will you teach me the way I can". Later I adopted the social model approach in my classroom. I tried to make changes in my instructional strategies in order to fit my pedagogy around the child as opposed to changing or curing the child. I had a child (Mat) (not his real name), in grade 4, who always presented the learned concepts in picture form or in diagrammatic form. He was used to negative remarks from other teachers for this. I started to accept his type of presentation in class tests and evaluated his illustrated answer script. It was a subjective evaluation, but it could boost his confidence and peer acceptance. I differentiated my instruction by using flexible grouping, provided activities that appeal to various learning style preferences, and created alternative activities and assessments. I realized that the practical aspects of the social model played a significant role in boosting up their confidence, whenever they were involved in group learning activities like other kids in the classroom. These thoughts inspired me to shift my negative attitude to a caring attitude accepting and appreciating every child as equal.

I realized that Pedagogy of the Oppressed is not a method, nor a technique nor a magic recipe and education is not an instrument by which the teachers can domesticate the students, or treat them as receptacles for knowledge, but it should be co-intentional education. Later I decided to create knowledge working as a “co-researcher” together with the students. I changed my instructional strategies to a problem-posing style, where the vertical, narrative flow of banking education is replaced by conscious acts of cognition performed by cognitive actors (myself and the students). To me, Freire’s belief that humility and respect nurtures a situation characterized by trust is absolutely true. In many instances in my classroom, learning takes place when there is mutual respect and understanding between the teacher and the learner. The learner’s feelings and knowledge should also be challenged and directed and it should be incorporated in my pedagogy for a meaningful learning.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education in India has evolved in the last four decades. (Annual report, 2005-2006) Inclusive education is entering the official rhetoric while being promoted within the Indian educational policy framework. This rhetoric has influenced teachers' perceptions and beliefs on the education of children with disability in general education classrooms (Singal, 2008). The ideals of inclusive pedagogy have only minimal effects on teachers' classroom practices. (Dash, 2006). The general education teachers perceive education of children with disability as the sole responsibility of the special education teachers. As Indian society has relied heavily on special schools and the medical model of education for decades, teachers view the education of children with disability as being outside the scope of the general education curriculum. Ideas from the

discipline of Disability Studies can provide a useful starting point for the definition of inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy programs in India have seen lower levels of disability participation, due to scarcity of adequate human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers and community, non-disabled peers and their parents. Moreover, the number of students dropping out of school is getting higher, especially in destitute areas. Students are forced to leave school due to their parents' poor economic condition, and to work to help their parents make ends meet. This leads to the growing number of child workers, which in turn leads to physical and psychological disabilities. Most school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for students with disabilities in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on Disability Studies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. It is also worth noting that there are challenges around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices. (Singal, 2010). Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities did not receive any educational services. Inclusion is just beginning, in spite of four decades of policy formulation and implementation (MHRD, 2015). Therefore, factors associated with the successful implementation of inclusive pedagogy need to be explored and understood in depth.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I wanted to explore my pedagogical experiences, through the data which are the ultimate source of information for me to know the context of teaching disabled children in the regular classroom environment. I was cautious about what type of methodology I wanted to choose and what methods would allow me to express my differentiated activities in my elementary inclusive classrooms. I found that the readings of thesis written in the form of autoethnography would give me the most freedom to connect my experiences with those of my readers. There were moments of anxiety and questioning whether my own stories were worth telling but I kept asking myself, why not? My experiences shed light onto important situations for students with disabilities in different learning situations and their supports related to classroom activity.

From an autoethnographer's point of view, I experienced the different issues and challenges in my inclusive classroom. I have been the closest observer of how I use inclusive pedagogy. I have followed an evocative autoethnographic method of inquiry. In this autoethnography, the writing is in the first person, making the writer the object of research and thus breaching the conventional separation of the researcher and subject; the story often focuses on personal experiences and thus breaches the traditional concerns of research from generalization across different cases to generalization within a single case (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I have tried to look at me from my own pedagogical, philosophical and axiological

standpoint because that makes me more aware of my pedagogical practices and research methodology from positivism to constructivism in the inclusive classroom situations. It also makes me responsible for the process of narrating my experiences, weaving intricate biography from the past to the present in order to interpret my own consciousness in the teacher interactions that occurred in the class room environment.

Evocative autoethnography has no universally-accepted format or methodology. Autoethnographies are simply to be written in a format that best suits the researcher's needs. The study can be presented in a number of formats, including, but not limited to, —short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). I have chosen narrative storytelling to present a view into my culture because this format is the most familiar method for humans to understand life's epiphanies as a race (Ellis, 1997). In autoethnography, telling an emotional narrative with meaningful —truths and experiences is more important than stating all of the historical facts (Ellis, 1997). This story is incomplete and highly fragmented due to my own interpretations and personal constructs, but it is my understanding of the culture around me, which only I can put into words (Jones, 2005; Kelly, 2003). This story is not like any other; it is my classroom story, told through my eyes alone. As Ellis (1997) states, in autoethnography, sometimes I am front and center in the story, while at other times, I am on the periphery of the story. There is no standard method of autoethnographic writing. As Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain, Ethnography is what ethnographers do-- it is an activity. Autoethnographic writing involves personal expression about a particular event or situation. It involves careful

consideration of one's lived experience, which is often guided by ongoing dialogue in and out of the classroom (p.742).

WHAT IS AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnographic reflection is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe, systematically analyze and interpret (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience, beliefs, and practices (ethno) through a rigorous self-reflection in order to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life (Ellis, 2016).

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Bochner, 2016). Muncey argues that autoethnographies are a celebration of personal stories that shape our understanding of a cultural experience of a group through subjective interpretations of an individual. Thus, the challenge for me as the autoethnographer is to connect my personal experience as an inclusive teacher to broader and fluctuating aspects of the teaching/learning environment due to different needs of students (Muncey, 2005).

Auto-ethnography is "a kind of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, 1997). She explains these texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as the stories are affected by history, social structure, and culture. It is part of a more recent style of anthropological practice known as 'reflexive ethnography' in which the researcher's personal experience becomes the focus of inquiry, illuminating the culture under study (Ellis & Bochner,

2016, p. 740). This method offers the reader to stand in multiple places in the story, multiple levels of emotionality and experience to which they can connect through their own experiences in the world. During this process, readers interact with the characters in the text, becoming ethnographers themselves and coming to their own conclusions about what it all means.

The lived experiences of a teacher can add a great deal of depth and detail to the qualitative research regarding how teachers experience daily life in the classroom. Autoethnography gives voice to people who have been silenced in other forms of education research (Ellis, 2004; Wink, 2005). Members of ethnic minorities have been given an additional outlet through which to discuss their educational experiences, both positive and negative, to expand the discourse (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Personal narrative, a crucial aspect of autoethnographic writing, has long been used as a pedagogical tool for teacher education (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001). It has been observed that individuals develop professionally through writing personal narratives as it enables them to make meaning of their experiences and that narrative inquiry for educators is essential: “Deliberately storying and re-storying one’s life or a group or a cultural story is ... a fundamental method of personal and social growth; it is the fundamental quality of education” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001).

My experiences may not be the same as another person depending on the time, location, and situation of their experiences. I attempt to explain and uncover the challenging situations for an inclusive teacher that I come across through my classroom experiences. It can be used to help disabled students in their educational journey. I explore invisible pedagogical tensions and the solutions within daily practices and events in my classroom. As I became aware of the tensions

that exist, I grew in my awareness of how invisible forces translated into practices within my classroom that enabled my ability to succeed. As I became more attentive to the challenges around me, I began to focus on my personal, cognitive, and emotional transformations, along with the effects of these transformations on my personal life. Thus, through my voice, I paint a picture of a teacher and my differentiated instructions as per the needs that arise in my classroom. Throughout the journey of this study, I watched myself through the transformation from a regular teacher to a more inclusive teacher. The study itself required me to dig deeper into the role that I had created. By examining myself through this lens, each new perspective allowed me to grow and to find more creative pedagogical strategies.

I share vignettes that reflected upon my life with a focus on my teaching career. The writing of that narrative has been impactful and prompted more self-reflection, leading to a deeper examination of what I really wanted this study to capture; by using my love of writing to reflexively and honestly communicate in a way that gets to the reader (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). My approach was to write the vignettes. Employing a reflexive approach, I was able to return to my experiences and relationships within the stories and dissect my memories of the events ensuring the stories had depth and veracity (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2014). Studying the lived experience via recollections and storytelling adds a layer of authenticity and empathy (Jones 2014) because via the stories I could take the audience on a journey back into time with me. “Just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well that’s when the real work has only begun” (Ellis, 2016, p. 672). Ellis was right, for when I revisited the story, I was compelled to add further intimate details. I was able to provide a deeper, private explication of the recount

revealing epiphanies of self. . . and many undergrounds impossibly expressive feelings, beliefs, perceptions, perspectives and events of [my] teaching life

ORGANIZING MY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

In autoethnography, the data collection is less focused on time in the field or on the extent of data and more on the active collaboration between the researcher and the culture during the study (Creswell, 2008, p. 489). I used a reflexive anecdote for unusual incidents and challenges that I encountered during my pedagogy in order to record cognitive thoughts, memories, and observations from daily interactions. The goal was to write with as much description as possible, retaining smaller details in order to recognize patterns as more entries were kept.

There are various ways to organize an autoethnography. I used personal commentary weaving stories, analysis and discussion throughout the entire work- discussing and analyzing the story. I noted down my struggles in the classroom and the way I overcame them in the form of anecdotes. I had a great collection of prominent incidents and successful experiences during the progress of my teaching career.

The goal is to use my experiences and “...tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. Ellis remarked that, you would write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours. You would want them to experience your experience as if it were happening to them” (Ellis, 2016, p. 116). I explain my sense-making processes and give a more in-depth insight into the experience. Reflexivity allowed me to look back at my

experiences, identities, and relationships within the story to determine how they affect and influence the current research.

All researchers who write about the self, need to make ethical considerations around the work that they are creating. For this autoethnography, I will be adhering to ethical principles and guidelines, such as removing names and any other identifiable characteristics, when conducting my research to respect the people in my stories (Adams, Holmans Jones, Ellis 2014). I have been careful to conceal the identity of each of the students, teachers, and colleagues by using pseudonyms. I have also been careful to generalize details about my location and the schools I have taught at to further protect the identity of those in my stories.

Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique (CIT) is a systematic procedure for obtaining rich, qualitative information about significant incidents from observers with first-hand experience, which in turn helps researchers to understand the critical requirements for individuals, processes or systems. It is a research method in which the research participant is expected to recall and describe a time when a behavior, action, or occurrence impacted either positively or negatively on a specified outcome. The instance reported by the observer is known as an incident. In order for the incident to be critical, the participant must be confident that the event had a causal relationship with the outcome (which is the focus of the study).

David Tripp has developed an approach to the investigation of practice and the enhancement of professional judgement through identification and analysis of significant episodes or critical incidents (Tripp, 1993).

Critical incident analysis is a pedagogical theory developed by Tripp (1993), whose analytical approaches allow reflection on teaching situations –the critical incident – so that teachers can develop their professional judgments and practices. It is a useful technique for self-reflection and one of the strategies frequently used to facilitate reflective learning. It involves the thorough description and analysis of an authentic and experienced event within the specific context. However, it has also been described as having the potential to expose the different classroom mechanisms and its different dimensions.

Critical incident analysis is applied in my autoethnographic research because it gave access to my personal experience as an inclusive teacher and facilitated a deeper understanding of the different needs of my students in the various learning contexts, teaching situations, and led me to reflect upon it in a systematic way and consider possibilities for future actions.

My incidents most often were concerned with students' understanding, classroom management, assessment, student behaviour, relationships with students, and student motivation. They did not need to be a dramatic event in the teaching context, just one that makes me to stop and think, or one that raises questions for me. Here, the focus is on unpacking critical incidents and exploring its role as one of those strategies that helps the continuous development of my students and myself. The procedure of a critical incident begins with a straightforward, descriptive account of an event. The account, or record, can be generated through diary writing, jotted note-taking, or a reflective journal entry about an event really encountered in the actual teaching environment.

I decided to use diary notes as my data source and critical incidents are developed and presented based on my anecdotes which I noted in my personal diary since 2005. When I wrote it down, I never thought it would be helpful in my future studies. I tried to develop each incident as a story in which I reflected my struggles simultaneously as an inclusive teacher and as an elementary teacher trainer. Through these stories, I attempted to explain how I overcome each situation by using my own differentiated strategies.

CONCLUSION

Tripp (1993) provides an authoritative framework for teachers to reason, reflect on and learn from their day-to-day teaching experiences. Tripp (1993) informs teachers that they have to be critical in their reflection and challenge their personal and professional beliefs in order to develop professional judgement. Through the reflection of my critical incidents, this autoethnography strengthened me to be more confident as an inclusive teacher and I hope this study will be a guideline for different teachers who are struggling when selecting differentiated strategies in an inclusive pedagogical environment.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The national move towards inclusion of disabled children in regular classrooms is the major issue and interest for educators, policy-makers and researchers (Ainscow, 2012, p.3). Numerous research studies were examined to gain a better understanding of existing relevant literature.

WHY INCLUSION IN EDUCATION?

Inclusion in education is a human right; inclusive education is a human right. The right to education is articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which states that “Everyone has the right to education.” (UNESCO, 2005: 12). UNESCO views inclusion as a “dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as a problem, but as opportunities for enriching learning” (UNESCO, 2005: 12). Therefore, the maneuver towards inclusion is not simply a technical or organizational change but also a movement with a clear philosophy.

The positive outcomes from inclusion of disabled children are immense as stated by Mcgregov and Vogelsberg (1998). These include: a) Disabled children demonstrate high levels of social interaction with nondisabled peers in inclusive settings. b) Social competence and communication skills of children with diverse abilities are improved in inclusive settings. This is believed to be closely associated with greater opportunities for social interaction with non-disabled peers, who act as models for children still developing age-appropriate social and communicative competencies. c) Disabled children in inclusive settings often have a more

rigorous educational program, resulting in improved skill acquisition and academic gains.

According to Mitchell (2008) inclusive education is preferred on the basis of three main factors.

In the first case, learners with different educational needs will gain academically and socially and will improve their self-esteem. Other learners will also gain academically, and be able to appreciate the diversity of their society with a greater recognition of social justice and equality.

In the second case, in most countries it is accepted that learners with special educational needs have a right to be educated alongside their peers who do not have disabilities. The third reason is that inclusive education is cost effective in covering the expense involved in transporting and accommodating learners in special schools, especially in remote rural areas.

The general education setting plays an essential role in developing and meeting the needs of students with severe disabilities in many areas including academic, social, and communication skills. In general, disabled children educated in inclusive settings receive higher grades, and achieve higher scores on standardized tests than disabled students placed in separate classrooms (Rea, Mclaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). The inclusion of disabled students in the general education setting is a successful approach for ensuring that those students develop skills in many different areas of academic achievement, social development, and general communication.

Research reveals that the academic accomplishments of disabled students increase through interaction with typically developing peers in an integrated environment, and they meet the goals of their individual education programs (IEPs) (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984). Additionally, students with disabilities increase academic performance in main academic skills, such as reading and mathematics, in the context of cooperative learning groups in an inclusive

environment (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004). Another study conducted by Cole et. al. (2004) indicates that achievement outcomes in math and reading for students with disabilities placed in 16 programs in general education settings were increased when compared with students with disabilities placed in special classrooms.

In terms of communication skills, studies revealed that disabled students improve their communication skills in inclusive settings when compared with students with the same disabilities in self-contained classrooms. Snell and Eichner (1989) pointed out that disabled students placed in general education classrooms have a greater opportunity to develop their communication skills through interactions with typically developing peers. Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, and Smyth King (2004) indicate that students with significant disabilities experience more communicative interaction in inclusive settings than students with significant disabilities in special education classrooms. Finally, several studies mention that disabled students develop their physical coordination and social skills by communicating and observing typically developing students in an inclusive classroom setting (Hunt et al., 1994). Overall, research findings indicate that the inclusive environment supports an opportunity for disabled students to increase and develop a variety of skills in terms of academic achievement, social interaction, and communication skills.

REALITIES OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Implementing inclusion in classroom is not without challenges. Children with different needs and the inclusive teachers encounter several challenges. Physical, social and learning environments can be a barrier to disabled people. The physical environment includes buildings,

educational institutions or schools with accessible washrooms, classrooms and ramps. The social environment includes cultural beliefs, customs, negative attitudes, misconceptions, neglect due to societal norms also can create barriers in addition to the experience that disabled children already had. This unpleasant environment leads to low self-esteem of disabled children and prevents disabled people from being free and confident to access education as is their human right. Society plays a huge role in the disabling of people. The learning environment includes, learner diversity, differences in student backgrounds, needs, dis/abilities, interests, learning rates and styles, learning materials, teachers' creativity, their knowledge and skills also create challenges in classroom atmosphere.

Sen Malini (2007) reports that the biggest challenge to inclusion of disabled children is lack of awareness in school authorities and teachers in India. Most schools do not have the appropriate environment to make disabled children feel welcome. "Besides lack of resources and infrastructure, the current education system does not allow for individual development of children at their own pace. Teachers are unable to cope with differences in children, not because they do not want to, but due to lack of training to identify disabled students. All this stems from lack of awareness". (p. 12).

The main challenge with the inclusion of disabled students in general education classes is that each of these students, just like traditional students, is different and learns in many different ways. Some of these students are nonverbal and some simply do not have the same intellectual capacity as traditional students (Jacob, Olisaemeka & Edozie, 2015).

To overcome the challenges of adopting an inclusive education model, the external control on students' achievement, such as testing requirements, should be minimized and to allow classroom teachers to develop their inclusive skills and monitor their students' academic progress (Forlin, 2010). Poon-McBrayer and Wong (2013) found that translating the inclusive education policy into practice, continues to be challenging due to lack of relevant resources for teachers and shared collaboration. Therefore, context-relevant policies "together with systemic changes, values building, personnel training, and resources are among the core components to succeed in this reform and ensure that no child is left behind". (p. 1522)

Environmental Realities

Disabled children who enrolled in my school had encountered several environmental barriers to equality in education. These include inaccessible buildings, classrooms, toilets and lack of different learning aides and other supports known as reasonable accommodations.

Reasonable accommodation is a key component of the right to inclusive education.

Accommodations may include hearing aids, easy-to-read learning materials, sufficient number of learning aids and structural modifications to schools, such as ramps for children in wheelchairs. I witnessed an incident with the non-movement facilitative. My school manager refused to move the classroom from the upper floors to the ground floor to accommodate a student with physical disability. The parent had to carry his 7-year-old son, who uses a wheelchair, up and down 10 stairs in the school. There were classrooms available on the ground floor, but the school manager said that they were allocated for third grade students. He had to spend all day in the classroom, including during the break or exercise time. He didn't drink or eat at school, so that he wouldn't have to use the toilet. If he needed to, then he had to call his mother and get her to come help

him. I could see in his face how disappointed and ashamed he felt. These barriers may also force some children with disabilities to drop out of school, to enroll in a school far from home, or even be forced to attend a residential special school, living separated from their parents, often for many months at a time.

The physical environment (classroom layout and appearance, classroom arrangement, furniture arrangement, etc.) contribute a lot to promote an active-learning method. According to Dilnesaw (2009), the physical environment in a classroom can challenge active-learning. According to him, there should be adequate well-maintained and furnished classrooms to effectively conduct teaching-learning process. Therefore, the place where the child is positioned in the class, the way the classroom materials are arranged, the effects of the sound environment and the condition of a building play a vital role in enhancing or retarding the teaching-learning process of children with different needs. Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) reported that the school has to make sure that each child should gain independent movement on the school premises and classrooms. Such interactions with the school environment have to be done in the most facilitative and efficient manner.

I knew from experience that classroom seating arrangements could affect student learning, motivation, participation, teacher-student and student-student relationships. Whenever I assigned small group activities, usually I tried to rearrange several tables together to form student groups (e.g., 3 - 4 students), or pairs. This arrangement could be especially helpful when students work in groups or pairs with their classmates for a large portion of class time. By simply

rearranging the desks in the classroom, I could not only get better control of my class but created an open and friendly classroom environment.

Independent movement, for example, can only take place if the given environment is not only least restrictive, but also most facilitative. Major physical challenges are architectural/infrastructural and those physical in nature (Marinelli and Dell Orto 2014). In my school, a disabled child using a wheelchair, or stretchers was forced to sit in the classroom during the physical education class time, because of the uneven playground. Physical barriers refer to: uneven playground or uneven terrain, within the school compound, and architectural or infrastructural barriers refer to all those features that are architectural in nature, like: poor door designs and doorways - as characterised by door handles not at the correct height, inaccessible doorways, and slippery floors. As part of the learning activity, students would get an opportunity to practice their learned concepts on the chalk board. However, they could reach only up to the lower part of the chalk board. Once I suggested in a staff meeting to construct three or four chalk boards on the classroom wall at a height of one-meter from the floor. Therefore, I felt the environmental barriers include inaccessible chalk board, tables and chairs, narrow spaces for wheelchairs, toilet seats and hand basins, especially left at heights not facilitative or user friendly to one with a physical disability. With an inclusion mindset, inclusive classrooms will make an effort to adjust their environments in order to meet the child's educational needs.

Societal Realities

In my early years of my teaching career, I believed that students with intellectual disabilities were not able to participate in learning activities like other students and they were not

capable of making decisions. I thought that if a student has a speech impairment, then he/she could not understand my explanations. Sometimes I assumed that a student with poor vision could not enjoy videos or visual learning materials. Often, I neglected my disabled students for fear of saying the wrong word or offending them. Later I realized that those perceptions became an attitudinal barrier for my students. Social perceptions, attitudes and influences have historically been a significant contributor to exclusionary practices and continue to provide barriers to inclusion. As Armstrong and Spandagou (2010) argue, “social change is imperative if disabling attitudes to those with impairments in educational settings are to be overcome”.

Thomas and Loxley (2001) examine the way children are categorised out of the regular education system into special education and observed that “special education is permeated by an ideology of benevolent humanitarianism” (p.176). When educators’ actions are motivated by a charity discourse, leading to feelings of concern and sympathy for the ‘plight’ of some students, classroom practices frequently translate into low expectations and approaches that segregate and isolate individuals (Cologon & Thomas, 2014). Thomas and Loxley (2007) warn that, the process of classification and provision may aim at meeting individual needs, it also creates a “social categorisation of weaker social groups” (p.102).

Similarly, a medical model of disability, that focuses on deficits and disorders and endeavours to fix, only entrenches negative societal views about difference and barriers to participation (Ballard, 2012; Cologon & Thomas, 2014). Voicing similar concerns, Finkelstein (2001) argues “it is society that disables us and disabled people are an oppressed social group” (p. 1). He advocates the importance of ensuring that people with disabilities have opportunities to articulate and draw

awareness to their experiences of inequality, and actively contribute to the restructuring of society and removal of competitive and disabling environments and situations. Finkelstein stresses the need to adopt a social model of disability, to actively seek to dismantle the societal barriers that are perpetuated by current interpretations of disability. In his word “Disabled people have been abstracted from society and as an abstraction we embody the essence of social relationships at a particular point in historical time” (p. 5).

Krull, Wilbert, and Henneman (2014), studied students with classroom behavior issues and classroom learning difficulties (CLD) and the effects that their disabilities had on them socially. The study was conducted by using a questionnaire given to students asking which of their classmates they would classify as mean, who they would like to sit next to, as well as questions about their own academic self-concept.

The majority of disabled students in my classrooms experienced difficulties in obtaining peer acceptance and friendships. Negative attitudes of non-disabled students concerning disabled students resulted in limited acceptance by peers. There were few friendships, loneliness and even being rejected or bullied. This resulted in difficulties in joining group activities, declining academic performance, dropping out of school, negative long-term outcomes such as depression or other mental health issues. Value judgements are expressed in the form of labels. For example, stupid, different, abnormal, etc. These types of labels always exclude learners from learning experiences and opportunities to actualise their full potential. The end result is that students who experienced barriers to learning experience themselves as being abnormal, stupid, a problem, a burden to others, or different. (Ballard,2012).

Pedagogical Realities

One of the major challenges for teachers today is the continuous search for pedagogy and approaches that meet the diversity in an inclusive classroom. Ideas of inclusion assume that every pupil has equitable access to education and that schools organize learning spaces that accommodate everyone in the spirit of universal design (Edda, O., Hafdis, G., 2019). Facing these expectations, school systems and teachers have to consider how they can respond. Ainscow (2008) argues that teachers are the key to developing inclusive practices and pedagogies in schools because they are the ones who, based on their beliefs and knowledge, decide and choose the learning environment where pupils are meant to learn and work within the structures of the school system. From my classroom experience, I found myself better able to build rapport with my disabled students, and more students would come forward to discuss their learning needs with me. Many times, I felt disheartened to hear from students with learning difficulties that they often choose not to discuss their learning needs because they are afraid of being perceived as different from other students and do not want to be labelled as disabled.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) encountered variability in the capacity and confidence of teachers working with diverse student groups, including children identified as having additional support requirements. These researchers found that some, but not all, teachers were able to effectively work with students with diverse abilities. Through their research, they came to recognise the impact that craft knowledge, individual teacher's pedagogical knowledge, their everyday and personal understanding about effective practice, had on teacher capacity, particularly their ability to create an inclusive learning environment (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Recognising the complexities of classroom teaching and the daily challenges that teachers encounter; Black-Hawkins and Florian promote the importance of working in partnership with teaching practitioners to further develop craft knowledge and increase understandings about inclusion (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Also, identifying the value of building on the foundations of what teachers already know, their wisdom of practice, and providing supported opportunities and guidance that enable educators to learn about, share with colleagues and implement new more inclusive approaches, these researchers advocate that educators' professional learning journeys, their ongoing experiences and training, play a critical role in the understanding about inclusive pedagogies. In the early days of my teaching, whenever I stayed with students having challenging behaviour, I tried to discuss the classroom situations with the resource teacher. It helped me greatly to think of and find different strategies for their successful inclusion.

Increasing teacher capacity in identifying a need for a rethinking with regard to classroom approaches for diverse learners, Florian, and Young advocate the importance of teachers moving away from traditional thinking and strategies that focus on most or some students, and subsequently replacing them with practices that offer support for all. These researchers promote the view that "the challenge of inclusive practice is to respect and respond to human difference in ways that include rather than exclude learners in what is ordinarily available to others in the daily life of the classroom", (p.651) and alert us to the need for regular teachers to develop a learning environment that maximises the participation and learning of all students (Florian, 2010).

Sometimes in my classroom, I found that the disabled children had been separated from their classmates for a portion of their day and thereby they were withdrawn from the learning challenges and learning activities.

Similarly, Loreman et al. (2011) promote the need for teachers to adapt the curriculum to cater to learner diversity, stressing the need for teachers to embrace universal design to “take the curriculum they are mandated to teach, and translate that curriculum into meaningful learning activities that are relevant and accessible to all students in a class” (p. 231). It is important that teachers are aware of not only departmental and school curriculum requirements, what needs to be taught, but also know about and understand the pedagogy that underpins effective teaching and learning. Careful consideration must be given to the planning of teaching activities and their implementation to ensure that the curriculum design and pedagogical techniques support the full range of learners. Tomlinson and McTighe also promote the need for classroom teachers to reject one size fits all models Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006), stressing “the need for teachers to instead embrace the crafting of a curriculum that is accessible and ensures academic success for all, and the implementation of differentiated models of teaching, the adoption of teaching approaches that are responsive to student variance”(p.242). By adopting flexible teaching and learning pedagogies that relate to students’ needs, interests and experiences, schools and teachers further develop their capacity to create positive learning environments for all learners to create a profile of what they describe as the optimum classroom (Peterson, 2011).

When I was fully involved in the inclusive classroom, I learned instructional methods and strategies with which to successfully interact with disabled children, often one-on-one with those

struggling to comprehend the learning material. Sometimes I found it difficult, working with those kids. So, I tried to think a lot out of the box and I made different worksheets for them. I realized that I have different children with different issues, so to teach with one approach or with material which benefits everybody is a challenge. Many times, I faced challenges in the preparation of teaching materials with respect to the students' comprehension ability which varies one to another.

Catering for diversity can be both difficult and complex, but the fundamental goal of schools and teachers should be the development of improved learning outcomes through exemplary practice. To achieve this, teachers need a strong understanding of effective learning and teaching strategies, informed approaches and quality practice. Although the implementation of inclusive practices presents ongoing challenges for educators, the development of more equitable learning environments, environments that embrace difference and facilitate progress for all children (Slee, 2008) is a necessary and worthwhile challenge for teachers who are committed to improving learning outcomes for their students. Sometimes I felt like I could not spare enough time to focus on each child. Time is limited. I couldn't deal with children one-on-one. At times, a child gets emotional so along with the class I need to take care of this. It would happen suddenly. They would have mood swings and I couldn't figure out what to do.

The important role that regular classroom teachers play in the development of inclusive learning environments and the challenges that students encounter through a lack of teacher understanding of what constitutes inclusive practice is highlighted in a study conducted by Poed, Cologon, and Jackson (2017). Their findings highlighted the need for classroom teachers to

develop a solid understanding about what constitutes effective teaching and learning, and the importance of supporting and guiding teacher practitioners to ensure they are able to recognise ways in which they can develop and confidently implement skills and strategies that meet the needs of all their students. Reflecting on classroom diversity and the need for an advanced inclusive teaching practice in schools, Rosenberg and Walther-Thomas (2014) noted that teachers' preparation to practice in multifaceted and diverse school environments must be examined. Specht (2016) found that the adoption of inclusive practices occurs when teachers are "comfortable with the use of appropriate pedagogy and when they believe that all students can learn and should be included in heterogeneous classrooms". (p. 67) She adds that developing the capacity of pre-service teachers as well as their competency for inclusive practices is challenging.

From my teacher education classes, I understood that practice teaching is one of the most important practical activities in pre-service teacher education. The most effective way to improve the quality and effectiveness of the education programme for the inclusive setting is to reach pre-service teachers and teacher educators. There is a need for strengthening knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes of teachers for creating an inclusive learning environment in the natural setting. So pre-service teacher education should provide the knowledge to teachers about the foundational competencies, skill competencies and reflective competencies to meet the unmet challenges of inclusion.

IMPACT OF TEACHER'S ATTITUDE, BELIEFS AND SKILLS IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Teachers are central to realizing inclusion. In today's inclusive schools, general education teachers may work together to plan and deliver instructional programs that are considered to meet the needs of students. A teacher with the right attitude makes a lasting impact on the students' enrolment and their learning. A single inspired teacher, whether school, college or university, leaves a lasting impression on the minds of students, not only in terms of the knowledge and training imparted but also the values of teaching-learning and professional pride, and inspires a few students to emulate their teacher and take teaching as a profession.

It is widely recognised that the practices of classroom teachers impact on the development of effective, inclusive learning environments (Florian, 2014; Poed, et. al., 2017). For some educators, entrenched attitudes regarding disabilities, create barriers that impact on their willingness to embrace and implement more participatory and inclusive approaches (Loreman et al., 2011). These attitudinal barriers are frequently created by concerns voiced by various members of society that promote the view that classroom teachers lack the skills required to support disabled students (Graham & Macartney 2012). This can lead teachers not only to question their capacity to teach these students, but also encourage them to adopt practices that segregate and marginalise individuals, thereby perpetuating the barriers to inclusive education that some students encounter (Poed, et al, 2017). If these attitudinal barriers to inclusive education are to be overcome, teachers need to become more aware of the need to seek out effective strategies that support the full diversity of learners (Florian, et al., 2010). From my school experience I understood that teachers having no experience with disabled children have

negative attitudes towards inclusion of disabled students. A common remark was made about chaos in the class when there are students with visual and/or hearing impairments. Once one of my colleagues commented,

Such children who are unable to hear or speak can learn only through behavioral techniques. I do not feel that he/she will be able to learn more than this.

A growing body of research suggests that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion are the most important factor governing the success of inclusive education (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008). Beliefs and attitudes about inclusion are highly varied within the education community and consequently highly influential as to whether or not inclusion is successful in classrooms and schools (Wilkins & Nietfield, 2004). In fact, teachers' resistance to inclusion is one of the most challenging aspects of implementing an inclusive policy (Dyson, Farrell, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2004).

Negative teacher attitudes toward inclusion may exist for various reasons. Some classroom teachers believe that disabled students included in the classroom detract from the teachers' time with other students, and consequently are less effective in teaching their non-disabled students (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004; McGhie-Richmond, Underwood, & Jordan, 2007). Conversely, some teachers may view students with disabilities as beyond their personal instructional responsibility (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). In summary, research points to a significant number of students, teachers, and environmental factors that contribute to the formation and maintenance of teacher beliefs, which consequently impact the eventual success of inclusion. Sometimes I would hear some general comments from my colleagues that,

He cannot participate in the programme, because he is not capable.

Such comments originate from the basic attitude of teachers towards the disabled child. I believed that those attitudes of teachers emerged from a lack of understanding, which can lead the disabled child to ignore, to judge, or to have misconceptions.

The importance of positive attitudes by teachers for the success of inclusive education has been reported by a number of researchers (Carrington & Brownlee, 2001; De Boer et al., 2011; Ahmmed, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012). According to De Boer et al. (2011), “teachers are seen as key persons to implement inclusive education and positive attitudes are therefore argued as playing a considerable role in implementing this educational change successfully” (p. 337). Positive attitudes and beliefs combine to play a major part in supporting diversity in inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Silva & Morgado, 2004). Hodkinson (2005), notes “successful inclusion may be dependent first upon teachers’ positive attitudes on the beliefs on disability and, second, upon their perceived competence to deliver the lessons” (p.18). A study by Unianu (2012) argues: One of the main barriers in the practice of inclusive education is represented by the teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion and its principles. Attitudes are influenced by several factors such as the degree of children’s difficulties, the nature of children’s disabilities, the teachers’ experience with children with educational needs, the trust in their own capabilities to implement inclusive activities or the expectations towards the children no matter what are the differences between them and the curricular (Unianu, 2012).

In inclusive education, the teachers’ role requires flexible thinking in terms of being creative and innovative to accommodate diversity among learners with varying disabilities under

their care (Lohani, Singh 2010). Teachers' roles become realities when the skills and knowledge of inclusion they have acquired through formal training in teachers' colleges and universities and their own personal characteristics meet their understanding of disabled children' diverse learning requirements (Florian, 2014). In other words, a success in inclusive education in a country depends largely on the capacity of the teachers' skills and knowledge in inclusive education (Bourke, 2010).

This is because, "many of the attributes of beliefs about disability are conceived by teachers on the larger issues of epistemological beliefs about the nature of knowledge on disability" (Jordan et al., 2010, p. 262). The most serious form of negative attitude towards children with different needs is the rejection of children in their school (Ghergut & Grasu, 2012).

Chhabra, et al. (2010) state "many regular teachers feel unprepared and fearful to work with learners with disabilities' irregular classes and so display frustration, anger, and negative attitudes toward inclusive education because they believe that it could lead to lower academic standards" (p.222). The ways teachers exhibit their beliefs about their roles determine inclusion for better or for worse in learning in the inclusive classroom (Jordan et al., 2010; Unianu, 2012). The complex interplay between the common beliefs and values towards disabilities can help teachers to develop creative ways to involve disabled children in learning successfully (Skrtic, 1991).

Ainscow (2007) claimed that teachers' attitudes influence their thinking and as a result impact on their role in supporting inclusive practices. Some teachers have the tendency to hold low academic expectations of their students with disability in their classroom (Silva & Morgado

2004). I strongly support this opinion because some of my student teachers hold lower expectations for students with a disability label than they do for similarly achieving and behaving students without a disability label. In addition to lower expectations, the student may develop low self-esteem and experience issues with peers. It can create a sense of learned helplessness. The students may feel that since they are labeled, they just cannot do well or that they are stupid. This can also cause the student's self-esteem to be very low. If the teachers do not believe in the student's ability, then the student will not either. It can ultimately setup the students for failure. They further argue that teachers' impressions of the intellectual potential of a child labelled as disabled, that they were lower achievers than a non-disabled child, is what diverts their perception away from the original concept of inclusive education. Inclusive education is contingent on teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education and that nurtures disabled children's learning (Ahmmed, et al, 2012).

Therefore, inclusive education can be achieved depending on teachers' positive attitudes towards teaching disabled children without inferring certain stereotypical patterns in students' academic behaviour (Jordan et al., 2010). In other words, teachers' stereotypical and self-imposed perceptions of considering their pupils as good or bad closes their own motivation to be adaptable to each of their pupils' needs (Prater, 2010).

ENHANCE PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS THROUGH TRAINING

Professional development does not end at one stage; rather it is an on-going learning process (Petrie & McGee, 2012) and so the skills and knowledge teachers acquire through their training are reflected in the workplace (Ainscow, 2007). Professional development is important

because it introduces the teachers to curriculum and pedagogical reforms (Petrie & McGee, 2012). Teachers' efficient professional development is a necessity because teachers are key agents in transforming educational goals while performing their role as educators (Margolin, 2011). The literature acknowledges that teachers who are well equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge have a better impact on the success of inclusive education initiatives (e.g., Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007; Operti & Belalcáza, 2008;; Margolin, 2011) as they can then blend their professional knowledge and skills, adjust their role and recognise the practices they need to exhibit in order to provide on-going support for their diverse learners (Deppeler, 2006).

Specifically in the Indian context, in the teacher education programmes like the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) or the Diploma of Education (D.Ed.), there is no separate course for inclusion and so there is no possibility of knowledge about inclusion. For more effective teacher training, I would suggest that teachers with prior experience of inclusive settings be involved in pre-service or in-service teacher training programs so that their positivity towards all type of disabilities and rich experiences with inclusive settings can be shared with novices.

Opportunities must also be provided to pre-service and in-service teachers to witness actual classrooms where inclusion is working successfully, thus giving scope to highlight best practices in inclusion and case studies of successful implementation in teachers' training curricula.

Teachers' professional development can improve all students' achievement (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010; Petrie & McGee, 2012). Thus, "appropriate professional development, including teacher training is regarded as a cornerstone of the development of inclusive education" (Pearson, 2009, p. 559). Professional development for teachers has to be centred on

their skills and knowledge so that they do not lack efficient skills to handle children with varying learning needs (Opertti & Belalcáza, 2008), while still performing their role as teachers (Margolin, 2011). As Acedo (2008) argues, “when this type of support is not available and teachers are inadequately prepared and ill-equipped with skills to offer” (p.10), inclusive education has not reached its peak (Ntombela, 2009). In this vein, a plethora of literature has shown that the lack of inclusion skills and knowledge of teachers limited the facilitation of inclusive education (e.g. Irma & Kgwete, 2007). In order to provide students with rich learning opportunities and enhance their learning, teachers have to develop their own professional competencies, knowledge and pedagogy. Teachers develop their professional skills and knowledge in two different ways. Firstly, teachers gain their pedagogical skill through pre-service training and secondly, through in-service programmes (Acedo, 2008). I had changed my attitude to that of a more +inclusive teacher after attending an in-service training program. Later on I prepared lessons and activities with respect to the differences in my students’ abilities and learning styles. Those differentiated lessons could be created for making changes.

Pre-service training offered in colleges and universities is set out in accordance with teacher preparation plans laid out by the education department (Carrington & Brownlee, 2001; Margolin, 2011). The lack of appropriate information in teacher preparation curricula, untrained teacher educators and insufficient practicum experiences leave a new teacher ill-prepared in inclusive practices (Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012). Petrie and McGee (2012) argue that during initial teacher training at colleges and universities, both the practicum and course studies should equip prospective teachers for the new role. However, Margolin (2011) argues that the education of teachers in the classroom cannot end there; developing their professional

competencies, knowledge and pedagogies should be on-going and delivered whenever a need arises. That means changes in the education system are never ending, thus teachers are expected to undergo timely training through in-service courses to meet the new demands of up-coming changes. According to Petrie and McGee (2012) school-focused in-service training is characterised by continuing education activities which try to focus on the interests, needs and problems directly related to the job or the setting. In-service programmes are also a way to help teachers recapture their former knowledge and skills and to apply this in their current situation (Wearmouth, Edwards & Richmond, 2006; Margolin, 2011).

Regular classroom teachers need access not only to professional learning and guidance to develop their knowledge, awareness and confidence in implementing inclusive approaches, but also to encouragement to recognize the skills and practices they have already developed that cater to diversity. Teacher reflection, collaboration and continuous professional training provide opportunities for regular classroom teachers to further develop practices that cater to all their students. Harvey-Koelpin's (2006) conducted a case study that revealed that "general education teachers voice the belief that they feel unprepared to meet the needs of disabled students" (p. 139), while a recent study by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission found that 62% of classroom teachers reported they were inadequately trained to teach learners with disabilities (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2017). The Indian teacher education programme for regular teachers rarely prepares them for working in diverse classrooms and in particular does not equip them with the confidence, knowledge and skills to effectively support learners with disabilities. This is a key reason why so many children with disabilities remain out of school or excluded from the learning process within school.

Black-Hawkins and Amrhein (2014) explain that although many teachers agree with the principles of inclusive education, they are also anxious about their professional competencies, their ability to provide for the learning needs of all students. The self-doubt and expressed concerns of classroom teachers described by researchers such as Harvey-Koelpin (2006), Rouse (2008) and Black-Hawkins and Amrhein (2014), highlight the importance of ensuring that educators are well equipped, that they have knowledge, skills and support to develop not only their effectiveness but also their confidence working with diverse learners (UNESCO, 2005, 2017; Foreman, 2004).

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

After reviewing the related literature, it can be argued that educators in the mainstream classroom are challenged by the idea of including disabled students into the general curriculum. Often, it is difficult to visualize how to teach and meet the needs of the student who is performing at a different level. Addressing the challenges associated with diversity and mixed ability classrooms is both multifaceted and complex. The literature further indicates that educational change occurs at the classroom level. The classroom teacher is in charge and is the catalyst for change at the classroom level. If he or she is not confident in meeting the instructional needs of disabled students, the success of the program may be placed in jeopardy. After reviewing and discussing the studies, it is evident that: knowledge, concerns, attitudes and skills of teachers towards inclusive education are predictive of success of inclusion. Positive attitudes and good knowledge affect concerns of teachers involved in inclusive practices.

Many of the above studies were done on general aspects of inclusive education, but most of them had not been done in India. I cannot find any autoethnographic studies on inclusive pedagogy. At the same time, I did not find any similar studies done in the Indian context. My research is a reflection of my teaching experience, before and after the transition to being an inclusive teacher. It narrates the pedagogical realities of my inclusive classroom from an Indian context. A major gap in the above literature is the lack of studies that related to the practical success in the elementary inclusive classroom. A review of literature further emphasized the need to examine whether educators were prepared for the implementation of inclusive education into regular schools and to explore the nature and relationships of educators' knowledge, concerns and attitudes towards inclusive education.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents, my philosophical standpoint and the corresponding orienting theories that relate best to my experiences. Models of disability provide a framework for understanding the way in which people with impairments experience disability. They also provide a reference for society as laws, regulations and structures are developed that impact on the lives of disabled people.

MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

Introduction

The medical model of disability has received legitimacy from the World Health Organization. The organization debated the value of terms such as disabled, impairment, handicap. The World Health Organization defined disability as: "the effects of the impairment in everyday activities" (Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000). The medical model of disability explains disability as a problem that belongs to the disabled individual. It is not observed as an issue to concern anyone other than the individual affected. For example, in a school, if a student is unable to get into a school building with his wheelchair, because of some steps, the medical model would suggest that this is because of the wheelchair, rather than the steps. The main issue is that medical people tend to see all difficulties solely from the perspective of proposed treatments for a patient, whether or not this treatment orientation fits into the overall picture of their life (Brisendem, 1986).

One of the characteristics of the medical model of disability is labelling. The term label implies that there is an unequal relationship, in which “powerful groups have the means and are able to define the way less powerful groups are perceived and treated” (Vlachou, 2004, p.13). People with disabilities (PWDs) are referred to by such terms as invalid, cripple, spastic, handicapped and retarded and these terms are all derived from the medical model (Creamer, 2009). The power to diagnose and treat disabled children is located within the medical professions. This model places individuals into medical categories for medical convenience. Even when treatment of an educational kind is recommended, it is presumed that the information obtained from initial medical diagnoses is one of the critical determinants in decisions about methods.

The medical model of disability is sometimes referred to as the personal tragedy model (Thomas & Woods 2003), because it defines disability in a fundamentally negative way. Disability is regarded as objectively bad, as a pitiable condition, “a personal tragedy for both the individual and her family, something to be prevented and, if possible, cured” (Carlson 2017). As Carlson points out, this negative conception of disability has contributed to some of the questionable medical treatments performed on PWDs, including, for example, involuntary sterilisation and euthanasia (p.259). Disabled people are often viewed only through the lens of their impairment, subjected to attempted cures, institutionalised and isolated from the rest of society or even denied the right to live (Creamer, 2009). The medical model of disability assigns tremendous power to the medical professionals who diagnose people using criteria such as the ones noted above, because the very criteria being used for diagnosis have been developed from the perspective of what is considered normal in society (Thomas & Woods 2003).

Influence of Medical Model of Disability in Indian Education

The influence of the medical model of disability on the Indian education system was most prevalent during the 1970s and early 1980s. In accordance with the behaviourist paradigm that prevailed at this time, the major aim of education was to focus on interventions which promoted the child's development in key areas such as mobility and self-care, by moving the child in tiny steps towards an approximate norm. As long as disability is understood as having purely a biological basis, the main responsibility for failure to learn is placed upon the child, thus minimising the role of the environment on a child's development (Reid & Weatherly Valle, 2004). In the classroom disabled children are faced with a lack of expectation from classmates and teachers. There is a custom belief that they do not need good education, because later in their lives they are perceived to achieve less than their peers. A child who cannot sit upright may be excluded from certain activities and games.

This model is based on the view that all learning problems are the result of some organic disorder or disease. Neurological dysfunctions, biological errors and genetic factors are presumed to be the primary causes of handicapping conditions. Environmental factors are also presumed to contribute to the etiology of learning problems especially as they affect biological systems. Milestone development targets drive the early-years of the education system. From my experience, I noticed that if a child does not achieve a certain task by a certain age, they are then held back from doing the other things that they are able to achieve. This lack of flexibility prevents children's differences from being valued and respected, and the full possibility of the child's learning potential is denied, as they do not reach targets defined by other children's achievements.

Many of those who adopt the medical model suggest that there should be regular consultation between medical and educational personnel on appropriate ways of educating and caring for children with disability. (Ellis, 2015). One of the assumptions used by the medical model is that, due to individual deficit, there is a struggle to integrate disabled students into the mainstream of school life. I have personal experience in that one of my cousin's children who is intellectually disabled was denied admission by the head of the nearby private school.

India, with the world's second largest population (1.22 billion) and with the second largest education system, has a large number of disabled children and many who are not in school (Singal, 2006). I believe special education schools are medical interventions which promote isolation, segregation and social exclusion. The ideologies that the medical model is built upon are integral to the segregated model of education (Singh, 2016). Both see the individual and their disability as the problem, and both seek to fix the disability. Often, in India, segregated education takes place in special schools and completely separate classrooms for disabled students. Special education pinpoints the child as the impediment to learning, and as a result, these students will often receive a completely different curriculum and different methods of testing, rather than being taught the same curriculum as their peers. This separation in school often creates separation within other areas of life as well. These special schools segregated disabled children from the mainstream, thus developing a specific disability culture (Chadha 2003). Such institutions made an effort to educate these children within their comfort zone; thus, the choice for functional freedom stayed limited. The medical model of thinking explains the early education system focused on the child's impairment, the solution is seen as removing and caring for the child, while the impairment is dealt with, in a separate and specialised setting. After this

happens usual teaching can then be delivered. The child is sent to a separate setting where their impairment is dealt with first, and their development, if any, comes second. At best, the child is allowed back into a mainstream school, if they have achieved a degree of normality that the medical professionals are happy with. Regular education is put on hold until the impairment can be dealt with. The focus is on life skills, whatever they may be, not on actually getting on with the job of living!

The medical model assumes that a comprehensive diagnosis of physical, neurological or biological conditions should precede intervention in educational settings. All the therapy programmes are aimed at minimising impairments. If the child cannot do something because of their impairment; the activity and the way it is happening is not seen as the problem (Carlson, L., 2017).

Reflections on Medical Model in My Experience

Early in my teaching career, my interactions with students indicated that my attitude and practices frequently related to the medical model of disability. Sometimes I labelled a student as retarded or handicapped. In those days, I was not prepared for working with students with disabilities. I did not understand a student's cognitive impairment and might expect more from a student than he or she was capable of producing and this could frustrate me to label them as a backward child or a slow learner. I assumed that a disabled child does not have the mental capacity for classroom work or activities. Now I realize that labelling almost always blocks the essential purpose of good teaching. From my experience, I understood that no child should grow up with a label of being less-than, as this could have serious long-term consequences for their

self-esteem and the perception of themselves compared to others. My expectations concerning disabled children affected my instructional goals and methods. There were no particular efforts by me to make them understand more. Whenever I planned my lesson, the activities were not fit for them. Moreover, with my instructional tasks targeted to the range of students with similar needs, my disabled children always fell outside of my pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Sometimes I adopted a charity discourse that involved feeling sorry for individuals seeking ways to care for and protect them. The influence of the medical model of disability and the adoption of a charity discourse impacted on my attitude towards disabled students, particularly on my ability to recognise and break down not only physical barriers, but also the attitudes, beliefs and classroom practices that limit the participation and achievement of some of my students.

I realized that it provides the ideological justification for special education. The construct of disabilities is derived from medical-model thinking, which is most visible in the practice of disabilities, special educational needs (SEN) and special educational needs and disabilities (SEN/D). The concept of special needs fits the medical model in two ways; it suggests that disabled people need help and that said help necessitates specialist support. Additionally, the inclusion of disability in the SEN/D acronym implies that all disabled people need special educational support, even though many disabled people learn in the same way as their non-disabled peers. One of the assumptions used by the medical model is that, due to individual deficit, we must work hard to integrate disabled students into the mainstream of school life.

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

Introduction

By way of resistance to the medical model of disability, a new theory of disability began to emerge which has become known as the social model of disability (Oliver, 1981). This model is based on the view that disability is a social creation. Instead of seeing some but not others as deficient in various ways, the idea is that society makes some people unable to function as they are capable of functioning. Install ramps and lifts in buildings, and people in wheelchairs will no longer be functionally disabled. The Social Model looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, people with disability can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives (Oliver, 1981).

Social Model thinking leads me to stop thinking of disability in terms of illness/cure, and then become free to think about the problem in terms of attitudes and structures in society: the barriers. If I look at disability in terms of being a societal issue, and accept that disabled children have a part to play in the decisions in their lives, whether individually or by adopting movement thinking when addressing the barriers they face, I could treat them equally.

According to the social model a person does not have a disability – disability is something an experience of a person. The disability experience is often caused by the approach taken by society/individuals which fails to take account of people with impairments and their associated needs (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). This can result in people with impairments being excluded from mainstream society. For example; an individual is not prevented from reading a magazine because of blindness, but because of the absence alternative formats. A person is not prevented from going to see a play because they are a wheelchair user rather it is the absence of

accessible transport and access to venues that causes the disability and exclusion. The social model of disability also focuses on people's attitudes towards disability and recognises that attitudes towards disability can present barriers for disabled people in the same way the physical environment can. These attitudes are many and varied, ranging from prejudice and stereotyping, to unnecessary inflexible organisational practices and procedures and seeing disabled people as objects of pity / charity.

Oliver (1981) explained an overview of the origins of the model. As concluded in one of his papers, the Disability Movement is a valuable tool and, if used properly, "the social model... could become the hammer of justice and freedom for disabled people" (p.26). Society needs this "hammer of justice" because, whereas the medical model of disability is based on the assumption that the individual is disabled by their impairment, "the social model of disability reverses the causal chain to explore how social constructed barriers have disabled people with a perceived impairment" (Barnes and Mercer, 2003, p.164).

Purtell (2003) "illustrates students with learning difficulties are 'disabled' whose impairment is their learning difficulty: they are disabled by the social reactions to it" (p.29). This model is especially concerned with addressing the barriers to participation as a result of various ableist social and environmental factors in society (O'Connell, Finnerty & Egan 2008).

Influence of Social Model of Disability in Indian Education

The social model of disability and the argument that children's rights are compromised by special education because they are separated from typically developing peers and from mainstream practices have been a major driver for the policy of inclusion, described as the

process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of mainstream school (Booth et al., 2000). Disability is viewed as a social phenomenon (Reindal, 2008), resulting in attitudes and an environment which present barriers to learning, rather than it being due to the impairment itself. The social model of disability promotes inclusion, hoping to remove the barriers set by society by including all children regardless of their abilities in mainstream education. I believed that inclusive education is a social response to the medicalization of disability in the classroom and which is built around the goals and ideologies of the social model. From my experience, I realized that not much can be done to change impairments. A great deal can be done to get rid of barriers and create a more equal society in all aspects of life. Based on the social model, early years of an inclusive classroom should allow all children to be included and their differences acknowledged and valued, and all children have access to appropriate toys, learning resources and equipment.

A professor from the University of Plymouth argues that if disability is a problem for society, then society must change (Hyde, 2000). Under the theory of inclusion, children with different needs are to be taught in mainstream education alongside their peers. Inclusive classrooms are promoting the use of the social model using the principal that disabled children should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education. This model as a way of understanding different needs is to gain knowledge of the child by recognising both their strengths and weaknesses. The social model of disability is focused on the child's needs rather than their diagnosis. Their strengths and weaknesses as well as external factors such as a child's background and history are taken into account in order to find a suitable method of teaching, that will help the child to reach their full potential. With inclusive pedagogy in my classrooms, I

experienced that all children have unique learning strengths and learning needs. It allows disabled children to access education on a full and equitable basis with others. While engaging in learning activities, some of my children have difficulty in listening, thinking, writing, speaking, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. When my inner thoughts changed to be an inclusive teacher, I started to realize as all children learn in different ways, it is important to make every lesson as multi-sensory as possible. Students having difficulty in one area might excel in another. For example, I used both visual and auditory cues and created opportunities for tactile experiences too. I used to use physical cues, such as a light touch, when a student might get distracted or inattentive.

The social model became the dominant model in underpinning inclusive education because it is very similar to the fundamental philosophies of inclusion, especially concerning attitudes and equal opportunities in an educational context. This is how the social model became a dominant basis for inclusive education. In inclusive education, a student is not only defined by their biological dysfunction or labelled as disabled, but is recognised as a person beyond their impairment. In an early childhood context, a child is not automatically categorised and associated with their disability but given opportunity to work and play alongside their peers and perhaps exceed expectations, without the weight of a label. The social model does not deny impairment exists but does not want them labelled as disabled. From my elementary classrooms, I realized the fact that, accepting and encouraging children in work and play, regardless of their impairments, facilitates their self-esteem and promotes their perception of themselves, subsequently affecting their learning life. This means that the Indian educational system, now is responsible for including a large diversity of pupils and for providing an appropriate education

for everyone. The social model of disability has shifted the negative stereotypical attitudes towards disabled people and encouraged people to appreciate that everyone, able-bodied or disabled is equal. Therefore, the social model has the incremental influence that sparked human rights movements across the globe (Kett, et al. 2011) and called for disabled people to participate in all aspects of life including an inclusive education (Chappell et al., 2001).

Reflection on Social Model in My Experience

In 2005, as part of my in-service training, I had an opportunity to participate in a teacher's enrichment program conducted by ALDI. There was great discussion about the concepts of the social model of disability and the need to change the attitude of teachers towards the children having disability. After this program, while I was in the classroom, I could hear the question that "If I cannot learn the way you teach me, will you teach me the way I can". Later on, I adopted the approach of the social model in my classroom practice. I tried to make changes in my instructional strategies in order to fit my pedagogy around the child as opposed to changing or curing the child. I differentiated my instruction by using flexible grouping, provided activities that appeal to various learning style preferences, and created alternative activities and assessments. I realized that the practical aspects of the social model played a significant role in boosting up their confidence, whenever they were involved in group learning activities like other kids in the classroom. These thoughts inspired me to shift my negative and caring attitude to accept and appreciate every child as equal.

I clearly realized that Disablement is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social

barriers. (Disabled Peoples' International, 1981). It focused on ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. When barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives. I believed that the primary social barrier to be removed is the negative language and discourse of the disability label, such as deficit, handicapped, victim of, suffered from and disorder. The social model philosophy needs to be transparent in an inclusive school where no labels are given to students, classrooms or teachers. Based on this theory, an inclusive education system adopts particular strategies, such as universal design for learning and cooperative learning, and provides support systems in order to develop the student's potential to its best. It promotes inclusion, hoping to remove the barriers set by society by including all children regardless of their abilities in mainstream education. Their strengths and weaknesses as well as external influences such as a child's background and history are taken into account in order to find a suitable method of teaching, which will help the child to reach their full potential.

PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

Introduction

The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, fundamentally means the education of the oppressed. It is without a doubt that education is liberation and when individuals are marginalized, segregated, and have no access to education, there exists, as Paulo Freire (2000) the founder of critical pedagogy would note, oppression. People are, of course, oppressed for a diversity of reasons -- race, class, gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and ability. Ability is the foundation of the justification of the term disability. Oppression is a universal experience that is

felt by everyone at one time or another. The educator, the teacher, the facilitator or anyone who decides to commit to people, must re-examine himself/herself constantly. Freire's philosophy begins from a deep respect and humility before poor and oppressed people and a respect for their understanding of the world they inhabit which constitutes a knowledge no less important than the scientific knowledge of the professional/dominant group/oppressors as he termed them (Darder, 2002).

According to Freire the respect and humility fosters a condition of trust and communication between teacher and learner (Freire,2000). Education becomes a collective activity, a dialogue between participants rather than a 'top-down' one-way lecture from one person for the benefit of the other (Freire, 2000). According to Freire, the teacher has authority but does not become an authoritarian. His view of the teacher and the learner promotes human relations. The failure by teachers and learners to communicate has always resulted in strikes and demonstrations in our learning institutions.

Freire's Philosophy of Education

Aims of Education

Freire believed that the oppressed could transform their situation in life by thinking critically about reality and then taking action. The alleviation of oppression and human suffering is possible through education (Freire, 2000). When oppressed people learn about their own culture, history, religion, heritage, etc., the knowledge they get can have a transformative effect on their lives and lead to their own empowerment. However, Freire believed that education itself is suffering from narrative sickness and has played a central role in maintaining oppression and

thus it has to be reformed in order for things to change for the oppressed (Deans, 1999). By understanding the systems of oppression in the classroom and challenging the multiple factors that disable certain groups of students and institutional arrangements that maintain and perpetuate social and educational injustice. For me, the notion of intersectionality is adequately reflected in the lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Freire's pedagogy focuses on issues of marginalisation, power, justice and social transformation; and can mobilise new theorising concerning the complex nature of disability and the ways in which disabled students are socially and educationally positioned.

Banking Education

Freire's term for traditional education, the banking education allows the oppressors to maintain the system of oppression (Freire, 2000). In Freire's view, students under this system do not have the opportunity to question or critically evaluate the world in which they live and thus have no opportunity to change their lives for the better (Freire, 2000). The banking concept which criticized the narrative character of education which becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. He pointed out that those that are oppressing you, in most cases, often when they teach you, they pretend that you know nothing. He used the analogy of the bank, they [teachers] think you [student] are an empty bank account and their job is to deposit money [teach] into your account. He said, if you really want to teach someone properly, you must take your students from what they know and elevate them higher. Never assume that your students are stupid. Freire explained the true education, where the teacher and student are both exchanging experiences and learning from one another authentically, is the only way for an absolute change to come about and for more children to join

the struggle for liberation. Freire's thesis is that educators should take on the role of facilitator or co-ordinator as students discover the world themselves, instead of treating students like boxes to fill with prepackaged facts.

Reflection on Pedagogy of Oppressed from My Experience

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is, in my opinion, one of the best and deepest reflections on education ever. It is so complete and complex that one can read it again and again and discover new contributions/inspirations every time. I realized that Pedagogy of the Oppressed is not a method, nor a technique nor a magic recipe and education is not an instrument by which teachers can domesticate students, or treat them as depositories for knowledge, but it should be co-intentional education. Later I tried to create new knowledge working as a "co-researcher" together with the students. I changed my instructional strategies to a problem-posing style, where the vertical, narrative flow of banking education is replaced by conscious acts of cognition performed by cognitive actors (myself and students). To me Freire's belief that humility and respect fosters a situation characterized by trust is absolutely true. In many instances in my classroom, learning takes place when there is mutual respect and understanding between the teacher and the learner. The learner's feelings and knowledge should also be challenged and directed and it should be incorporated in my pedagogy for meaningful learning. Disability Studies at the University of Manitoba helped me to realize that disabled students need to be supported to recognize and understand the nature of their oppression and acquire skills to resist this. Prejudice and classroom oppression are at the root of a great deal of bullying, abuse, assaults, and other violence. Through greater knowledge and skills, we can protect children and teens from the harm

done by these destructive beliefs and can help prepare them to protect themselves. By learning Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed., I found myself agreeing with his ideas, arguments and analysis of teaching methods and pedagogies. I feel that students in the inclusive classroom learn best and most in depth when learning occurs through construction of knowledge and understanding between the teachers and students. I understood that direct instruction and the spoon-feeding of knowledge involve only low order thinking skills and do not address the needs, abilities and interests of all learners. I feel that in the field of teaching and education today, there are so many different components to account for, like different types of learners, different needs of learners and different circumstances that there may be instances in instruction where one method may be better suited than the other. Learning can best be achieved through critical thinking and analysis of one's experiences and feelings. In many institutions, the best performed subjects are those that learners do practically. I believe that whatever lesson plans teachers have or are prepared for the day should be flexible and based on the students. All of the information is not new to everyone though, so teachers should be able to learn from their students and be able to fluctuate their teaching lessons.

CHAPTER 5: MY CLASSROOM JOURNEYS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes different incidents in which I have been and explains the various behaviour patterns, attitudes, perceptions and thoughts of my students as well as myself, that shaped and changed the understanding of my pedagogy in the classroom environment. All my critical incidents reflect my understanding about the ways my pedagogical choices could enhance the participation and learning of my students in the classroom. My experience in regular elementary school suggested that the difficulties and understanding of selected strategies and interventions could cause me to question my ability to cater to the learning needs of some of my students. Employing critical incident analysis technique in this autoethnographic study documented and interrogated my practices and experience as an inclusive teacher. By explaining the incidents in my pedagogical practices, I realized how inclusion can be achieved in everyday classrooms and provide a further stimulus for the development of differentiated teaching approaches that cater to diverse needs and abilities, and meet the learning needs of all students.

AN EVOCATION

Dreams to Be an Exceptional Pedagogue

I had a strong desire and vision to be a good teacher since childhood and was very curious to know what it looks like. The aspiration to be a teacher developed in me since my

younger school days and it was supported by many factors. As a student, I always considered all my teachers as role models of what I wanted to become. My mother was a teacher, so in many ways, I spent my life emulating her and of course, there were teachers from movies and books that enticed me to envision myself as one of them.

When I closed my eyes, I dreamt of myself as a teacher in a village school, teaching diverse yet similar students. These students are in the second grade, meaning that they are impressive, packed full of energy and even naughty in their environment whether at home, school, or in their greater community. Some of these students don't speak Malayalam as their first language, and some come from low-income households that can limit their educational experiences outside of the classroom. And yet, no matter what differences these students bring to the table, from their uniqueness flows a positive energy that embraces, respects, and promotes learning. This was my dream when I was at the post-secondary stage.

My ultimate aim was to be a part of changing the lives of people through providing a creative method of education. To educate illiterate people means to bring light to their lives and to provide them a helping hand to build a healthy and renewed life. A teacher can change the lives of thousands of students. Yes, that was my motivation. My dream is to help them to dream big, identify their own potential through adequate education and make their life bright and colourful.

A Transition from Student to Teacher

Being a good student is not an easy role, what more is to be an excellent teacher? But what makes it more challenging is, these two words – student and teacher –when it is combined

together, ending up with the word student- teacher. I believe that student teaching was the primary as well as the most important learning situation. It was the time of trial and error to develop confidence and beginning expertise. It was not a time of perfection but striving for competence.

My entire practice teaching journey became more challenging and exciting. During my first week of teaching, it was very difficult for me to stand before students as a teacher, even though I made lesson plans and visual aids at night. One time, I was asked by a student for the answer to a question brought up by me, suddenly I realized that I did not know the answer and was unable to respond during the class. Whenever I was faced with an inappropriate behavior, I felt nervous and I was afraid of confronting students who behaved inappropriately. Before my practice teaching, my knowledge about teaching strategies was very limited and was encapsulated from text books. With the guidance of my co-operative teacher, I was able to look deeper and discovered the various teaching strategies that I could use in my class. While I was teaching the place value in grade 3, I focussed only on the explanation, like lecturing. My co-operative teacher guided me to use different learning materials along with the chart presentation. She helped me to be strong and let me do it on my own, she paved the way for me to use my ideas and handle the class at my own pace. I thought that I could manage my class, but in reality, I clearly saw that it was not as easy as I thought to manage my students. I used the rewards and punishment method in order to handle my class. With good behavior, I would reward them with additional points while negative behavior was met with deductions. This was how I managed my class and this method was tested and proven.

Every classroom scenario was different with my experience and in many such situations, I was helpless. I was not able to manage and did not understand the students' capacity and how to apply the appropriate teaching methods for some students. They were very different in class. I was not sure what the students want to do and what I have to do to help those students. I observed that one student could not use his hands to write due to having a problem with his motoric skill. I did not know how to help him. I also found a student who liked drawing all the time without paying attention to the classroom activities. From my teaching practice period onwards, I noticed that in the mainstream classroom, there were some students that were always neglected due to the teacher's perspectives and learning activities. They were busy with scribbling in their note book, making sounds, moving around, etc. Therefore, those children were not only unhappy, but they were also more likely to be bullied and to develop aggressive tendencies themselves.

As a Beginner

After my B. Ed degree, I started teaching in a private elementary school in Kerala. On my first day of teaching, I walked into the school with such high hopes of being able to reach all the learners. I have had the opportunity to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher and a learner. Throughout my first year of my teaching career, my routine of pedagogy continued with the methods and practices that I had learned in training. I did not let my students ask questions. I did not encourage them to do group work or cooperative learning. The class used to be in my full control and the students were passive listeners and copiers. I considered myself as the source of all knowledge to them. I was a transmitter of the knowledge to them and they were the receivers. The students were graded through terminal and final examination.

As the days passed, I realized that I need to learn how to incorporate a multitude of learning styles and interests into a lesson. It was another challenge that I was faced with during my teaching career. As a teacher, I found myself wanting to work with everyone and help them - especially when those tears started to roll down. The most interesting thing is that I also shed tears during this experience. This has made me think that it is okay to see your students and yourself struggle through a lesson or activity, that this is a natural part of learning. At the same time, as a teacher, I need to offer support and guidance for my students so that they may strive for success and not begin to foster negative feelings towards a particular subject. During the first year of teaching, I have been fortunate enough to experience this from both the teacher's and learner's perspective. As a teacher, I needed to have a goal and a vision in mind for my unit and the students. As a learner, I had to be willing to take risks and put my fears and identity on the line.

In reality, when I started teaching, I realized that it is not as easy as I thought; I was not able to be exactly like my role model childhood teachers. I taught the ways that were most natural to me, understanding that I needed to make adjustments for each student's uniqueness. After some trial and error, though I became more comfortable in teaching, I always felt that I have not become a real teacher, I didn't look like other teachers I had known.

Through the process of planning and teaching, I have gained a deeper understanding and awareness of my role in the teaching profession. There were challenges to be faced every day I taught, a talent to be discovered, and a moment to cherish that touches my soul and reinforces my devotion. Reflection seems to be the key to personal and professional growth: reflect on

lessons, students, yourself and experience will guide you the rest of the way. All of this has been a treasured teaching experience, a reference for me to look upon years to come. It is now a part of me.

Disability Develops My Cognition

In 2001, as part of my Master's of Education, I had a practicum to observe classes in two special schools for students with disabilities. Before this, like many of my colleagues, I also believed that students with additional learning needs were often more effectively catered to in special educational settings. I perceived that the teachers who worked in this special school setting would have superior knowledge, teaching skills and expertise in teaching students with additional learning needs that regular classroom teachers did not have. I was of the opinion that special schools, with their combination of support staff and teachers with specialised knowledge and experience and extensive resources, enhanced not only the academic development of students with disabilities, but also provided a more stimulating and supportive learning environment.

Throughout my visits to these special schools, my observations of teachers, students and classroom teaching approaches, challenged my thinking and encouraged me to question my beliefs about the provision of specialist setting schools and made me rethink how important the role of the regular classroom teachers is in teaching students having disability. Rather than provide me with demonstrations from experts in the field and examples of techniques and strategies that specialist teachers employ to support diverse learners, my experiences and observations at these schools encouraged me to recognise the disadvantages of segregated

settings. I realized that, in this special school setting, students may only learn and interact with peers having disability. They thus won't be exposed to a wide range of influences. The label special education can have a stigma or negative connotation in society and I felt being in a special school program can reinforce this. Special education sometimes involves lowering expectations and this may lead to problems at higher levels of education.

I had observed that a majority of the students had difficulty with accepting and following the classroom rules and routines. I felt one of the main challenges for teachers was identifying the child's needs and characteristics. Another challenge was staying calm and patient when the children were experiencing behaviour escalations. Learning to deal with situations in which students refuse to follow rules or listen to instructions is also very important and requires lots of patience and practice. In addition to providing one-on-one assistance, teachers are expected to attentively multi-task in order to help more than one student at the same time. Due to the diverse range of disabilities among the students in the classroom, each student has different needs. Hence, teachers must adapt to each student's needs and provide assistance accordingly. Some students learn better through visual aids and demonstrations, whereas others might be more comfortable in listening. Also, some students might learn more effectively when working in a team, as opposed to others who may learn better when working individually.

My observations in these special education schools, encouraged me to not only recognise the social and educational limitations that segregated settings can bring but also developed my awareness of the importance of the provision of effective pedagogical practice. Students in my regular school classroom (including those with a disability), were frequently subject to varying

levels and combinations of targeted explicit instruction, collaborative group work and independent activities. Mathematics and literacy were taught each day, to all students, and classroom tasks were frequently adjusted to cater to students having average learning needs and abilities. Regular classrooms frequently contain diverse students, but catering for differing needs does not involve a separate set of strategies or specialised knowledge for some students. I quickly recognized that effective teaching and learning transcends not only to students of age differences, but also the levels and types of student need. It requires commitment to effective teaching and learning, the implementation of inclusive practices that support everyone. I realized that the regular classroom teachers should be competent in a wide range of relevant knowledge and skills that allow them to cater to different student needs. Diversity, creativity and innovation are the part of everyday classrooms. As a teacher, observing teaching practices in the special school environment, has heightened my awareness of strategies that regular classroom teachers should strongly recommend to cater to students' diverse needs in the more inclusive environment of a regular school.

My Classroom Environment and the Medium of Interaction

Establishing a learning environment where the students feel safe and secure is as essential as it is motivating to every learner. I believed that the classroom environment influences them tremendously. Students should feel that they are in a safe, nurturing and supporting environment where they can learn. I tried my level best to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment to grow socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Everyone in the classroom, both teacher and students, have the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences. No two people are the same; everyone is different and has different perspectives.

My language in the classroom is my mother tongue “Malayalam”, which is the first language of my province Kerala in India. Mother tongue is the language that a person learns from his/her infancy, and thereby every student can communicate easily without any stress. It can help learners to feel included and accepted as part of the school community. First Language is intrinsically linked to learners’ identity and emotional well-being and so the use of the language of the home will help learners to feel more confident and secure. Learners will be more focused and motivated if learning builds on prior knowledge of language experiences.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

1. “I am confused”- Choosing a strategy

John (not his real name) was the most active student in my grade three class. He was very disruptive in almost every class, and even more when I was teaching. I was completely uncomfortable. He made me feel ineffective because I did not know how to respond to his challenging behaviour. When I acknowledged a student for a behavior that I liked, John would do the exact opposite of that behavior. He seemed to have absolutely no respect for his co-learners or me. I used every strategy I knew to work with him, but nothing worked. What I found to be most difficult was that I was always questioning myself about the way I managed the classroom. I really needed to focus on John throughout that course because I felt that I needed to learn different strategies that work with him and it should help other students like him too. It was obvious to me that something had to change. At that point, I did not know how to respond to his

behavior in the classroom. I started to study more about him. He came from a working-class family. His mother and biological father had been divorced for the majority of John's life. He lived with his mother and step-father; he called his stepfather Dad. From what I understood, Dad did all of the disciplining in their home.

Most of the other students looked up to John and followed his lead. Often times a student was asked to choose a friend to help them with something, about six of the boys in our class would automatically choose John to help them. Outside at recess time, I could see that John was the leader. He told the other students what to do and if they didn't comply, he had the other students run away from the one who wouldn't comply. There were many times when I went outside to meet the students after lunch and I found one of them crying. Four out of five times the students were crying because of something that John said to them. John could be an excellent helper. He had been in the classroom longer than I had. He was very familiar with where everything was in the classroom and he was always more than eager to help. I would jump on this and draw from this strength, but when I asked him to help too often, he began to think that it was his job to help and nobody else's. I felt frustrated and wanted to find a way to work with John that would benefit him, the class, and myself. I had quite a task on my hands, but I took it activity by activity and finally, I came up with a positive strategy. I bestowed him with a leadership role in class. Gradually he tried to be role model to everyone.

Based on the Disability Studies (DS) analysis, I realized that just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, each and every student has an individual strength. No two students are the same, and no individual student has the same response to learning in every situation. What we consider a

disability for a student in one situation may be a difference that enriches that student's learning experience in another situation. In this incident, I could find John's leadership quality as one of his strengths and by assigning the leadership role, I could sense a drastic change in his behavior in the classroom. I understood that peer acceptance and relationships were important to John's social and emotional development. It provided a wide range of learning and development opportunities to him. This included companionship, recreation, building social skills, participating in group problem solving, and managing competition and conflict. As teachers strive to meet the needs of all students, they will realize that there is no clear, consistent dichotomy between special and regular students. The same students will not always be at the top or the bottom when they are evaluated according to their intellectual, social, physical, and creative abilities.

2. Effect of co-operative learning strategies

Paulson, a 12-year-old with Down Syndrome, had a vocabulary of about 25 words. When he first began attending science classes with his peers, he spent most of the time wandering around the room, tapping students on the shoulder and grunting. I assigned the entire class to heterogeneous groups of three and taught them collaborative skills. To facilitate Paulson's interdependence, I awarded extra credit when all members in a group completed a report on the activity and a randomly selected teammate would explain it to him. To assure individual accountability, I gave independent grades to students. Paulson also attended a study hall where student tutors primed him for science class by helping him practice activities in advance and prepare materials for experiments. For example, when the class had to graph various climates

and compare them to their own weather, Paulson pre-drew the scales and brought the charts to class. Through this activity, he made progress on his math goal—writing numbers—and the fine motor goal of drawing lines. Other groups had to prepare their charts in class, so Paulson's cooperative group members had more time to assist him in charting climates. During some activities, Paulson operated as the class "checker." Students showed him their completed assignments, and he accompanied me when students explained the activity, keeping a record of which groups had earned extra credit. Paulson not only assisted the teacher, but he also developed appropriate skills for the world of work. As a result of his inclusion, Paulson began saying hello to peers before class. He also took responsibility for completing class tasks and practiced his fine motor and number recognition skills.

When I tried a cooperative learning strategy as a differentiated pedagogy, I realized Paulson's inclusion influenced other students, especially those who, prior to this experience sat with students from their own ethnic group and didn't talk much with other students during classroom activities. After initiating cooperative learning groups and teaching collaborative learning strategies, I noticed that the on-task behavior of all students increased and that they began to interact across different groups. As a DS student, I realized, we won't know what gifts are hidden in our students until we unwrap their packages. Most successful teachers of inclusive classes have found that when they teach basic skills within the context of meaningful lessons, all students can achieve higher-level learning. This incident helped me realize that cooperative learning is a successful pedagogical strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, participate in a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Students who are part of a community of learners tend to rise to

higher levels of learning and joy, especially when they work cooperatively on in-depth, project-based units of discovery. In these supportive classroom communities, students acknowledge and appreciate one another's skills and talents. Each member of the team is accountable not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an environment of success. Students work through the assignment with a group spirit until all group members successfully complete it. In addition, a learning environment that values participation in cooperative activities can reduce disabled students' academic anxieties and build their confidence as they receive positive recognition for what they bring to the community of learners.

3. A creative topography by Naveen

As an inclusive teacher, developmental educationist and a teacher trainer, I have always been interested in how the child learns, and not the what and why aspect of why a child does not learn. I always believed that every child can learn at their own pace and it depends on the reflective practices based on my own teaching, as well as the ability to change one's practice to reflect the child's abilities, learning styles, motivation and interests. In this incident, I have a 5th grade student Naveen (not his real name) who had limited verbal abilities, engaged in self-injurious behavior, his verbal stimming was extremely disruptive, and when he got angry would often hit or kick anyone or anything that was next to him. In circumstances like this I felt, I was a failure and I could not deviate his attention into something else. I never thought that I would be successful in such a classroom situation.

The first stage of my action plan included, examined the student's interests, communication skills, and adaptive strengths. The idea was to discover who Naveen was, what he liked, and what he was good at. In the second stage, the plan included a resource teacher, a lesson that would take into consideration Naveen's strengths. Despite all of Naveen's communication and sensory issues, he was a wizard with scissors. In fact, that was one of his favorite things to do. If he wasn't cutting strips of paper or cardboard, he was shredding paper with his hands, or picking up leaves outside and crumpling them in front of his eyes so that he could see the minute pieces fall to the ground. In the third stage, I tried to implement my plan so that whatever we did in the 5th-grade classroom, it would involve cutting. After a few more sessions, the day finally came. It was time for Naveen and me to walk down the long hallway to the classroom for science class. The activity was to create a topography map out of cardboard. Luckily for Naveen, there was cardboard to be cut for this activity. As he sat in his seat in a classroom with 35 or so of his peers, I was astounded at how calm and focused he was cutting to his heart's content.

His task was meaningful, age-appropriate, and that 45 minutes was the only time he sincerely was involved in science class. This type of activity set me on a path of believing that any student could be successful when certain conditions were present. Through this incident I wanted to make sure that my students would recognize all of them have different strengths and weaknesses and they should feel like they are valuable, just as they are. From the DS point of view, I would always refer back to the point that we were from many different backgrounds and ability levels, but the goal in my classroom is for us to accept each other as we are with our strengths and weaknesses and to know we have a lot to learn from each other. Such lessons stimulate critical thinking and motivate students to make personal connections with the material. Stereotypical

academic success no longer becomes the only standard for who is smart. Students who learn about their own and their classmates' unique abilities begin to shed previous negative attitudes or preconceived notions about disabled students. I strongly believe that inclusive pedagogy benefits all students.

4. Multisensory activities for Jude

The hero of this incident is Jude, who was a 10-year-old child, had great difficulty in reading and writing and had shown much difference while learning. He could write a few letters of the alphabet and completed very simple maths problems. During class, Jude could not sit in the same place for a long time and always walked around the room. He sat down in class only for a few minutes. He was described as lacking in self-confidence and trying to fade into the background and also labelled as polite, cooperative, respectful, and showing sensitivity to his classmates. In his words

“I used to never be able to read fluently...I used to make lots of stupid mistakes...I’d spell really little words wrong...I’d mix them up.”

I started to study each of my struggling learners, and they taught me how they learned. I understood that how the content reaches a child’s brain varies from child to child and realized the need to teach in different ways that utilized several pathways to the brain so that all my kids had the same chance to learn. I found a true multisensory lesson would engage Jude on all these levels at one time. I realized that multisensory lessons are very effective because no matter the

learning strength of each child (be it auditory, visual, tactile, or kinesthetic) it would target the learning strengths of all students at one time.

In one of my multisensory lessons, for example, Jude could see a new word spelled out with magnetic letters, could hear the demonstration of a related spelling rule, try out the spelling rule for himself by manipulating the letters, and articulate each sound of the new word when he wrote it out on paper. This combination of activities uses multiple pathways to the brain. I devoted my extra time with Jude through tutoring on multisensory learning. I appreciated, how effective it was for teaching reading to young elementary students, especially in terms of sight word recognition and through this strategy I could have a lot of fun with my students. At the end of this academic year, the school reported that he would participate more fully during whole classroom instructions. He was described as fitting in well with his classmates, taking initiative to join in, and becoming more outgoing. Jude was noted as improved in following through with multisensory learning strategies. He was motivated and wanted to do well in the classroom activities.

The multisensory approach is a differentiated strategy which is a very effective solid teaching for all students. Definitely it will make classroom lessons more accessible to students with learning differences. My DS courses strengthened my knowledge regarding the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Multisensory instruction aligns with the UDL framework. Classrooms that are designed using UDL principles give students many ways to engage in their learning. Now I comprehended clearly that through this strategy, all the learners are simultaneously using multiple senses. Every student should use three primary senses which are

visual, auditory, and kinesthetic and these senses correspond to its memory. The more pathways and connections a student use for learning a new item of knowledge, the more pathways they have for retrieval of this information. Use visual, auditory, kinesthetic/tactile activities for teaching or reinforcing concepts whenever possible. Many of these teaching practices are also suitable for classroom accommodations for struggling learners.

5. At last Bony makes some friends!

Bony, a junior boy with lots of challenging behaviour, was getting below average grades in his classes. He was always alone and faced difficulty in making friends. He frequently engaged in continuous meaningless conversations, repeating a question several times. Bony's challenging behaviour also affected his ability to write essays and to answer questions. I assigned his peers the primary responsibility for helping Bony to engage appropriately in conversations, although they required some instruction to do so. I tried to redirect him to join their conversations with the same topic and gave them permission to tell Bony when they didn't like what he said or did. In his class, I discussed friendships and arranged some roleplay activities to make them aware of the need to be a part of large school body. I intently focused on showing Bony how to earn and maintain friends. Previously, students had ignored or avoided Bony when he tried to talk with them. Once they understood how to talk to him, however, his skills improved, and students included Bony in their groups more often. I also let him express his learning in alternative ways. Some of my colleagues also worked with Bony to improve his ability to write essays. Finally, I decided to change the assessment pattern with him and he took multiple-choice tests to demonstrate his knowledge of specific course content. Throughout the year, Bony continued his

progress, while learning to enter conversations and stay on the topic. His peers learned to redirect Bony and to express themselves more directly.

DS empowered me to realize, many students with severe disabilities were separated into special education classes and missed out on the benefits of having long-term social relationships with classmates who did not also have severe disabilities. As a result, when they left the supervised classrooms, they were not ready to join the larger, heterogeneous communities in which they would live and work for the rest of their lives. Friendship is a big part of life. The ability to make and keep friends is a skill that has to be learned. It has a great role in developing self-esteem. Developmentally speaking, making a friend in school is every bit as important as getting an alphabet A. Learning how to form successful peer relationships is a critical skill for kids, and one that they will be using—and refining—all their lives.

6. The happiness of teaching

One of the most important lessons I learned through this incident was the significance of building relationships with students. This experience really opened my eyes as to how instrumental this approach can be for a student's personal and academic growth.

One student, whom we will refer to as Don, routinely struggled to stay on task and frequently disrupted our lessons. The one exception was during Physical training class for one simple reason, Don loved basketball. Once he was on the playground, he was practically a different student; he was focused, determined, outgoing, and confident. His genuine commitment to the game took away the stress of school and allowed him to fully enter his comfort zone.

Armed with this new knowledge, I started to finding ways to work Don's love of basketball into other classroom activities. During library time, I collected books and newspaper articles about the sport. In math class, we tried to create custom word problems involving sports terms. I even used the game as an incentive for good behavior (if you finish this task within the time, you would get five extra minutes for basketball later). The effect on Don's engagement in classroom activities was immediately obvious. He was much more involved and focused in the classroom, and we experienced far fewer incidents of misbehavior. His academic performance improved and overall, he seemed to be a much happier and productive person than ever.

I soon realized that Don was actively included in everyday learning activities. Working in an inclusive classroom proved to me that everyone has something that piques their interest, whether it's sports or painting or music, and I've become a better teacher because of it. If you can discover what that special something is, you gain an incredibly helpful tool for your teaching methods. Teachers need to be sure that every minute of the day is accounted for and contains some form of activity. My early days were full of down time, and I would notice my students becoming restless and distracted after only a few moments. As a teacher, the relationships with my students depends on how I manage them. I experienced that some students had developed attachments and showed affection in unique ways because of their behavioral and emotional issues. Instead of holding in-depth conversations with students, usually I could experience plenty of nonverbal communications like gestures or artwork. I appreciated these forms of communication. The bond between an inclusive teacher and student was not weaker, it was just different. One student (Geetha) had trouble with penmanship to the extent that she could hardly write her own name, but she was an enthusiastic artist and our classroom was littered with pictures of her and her

classmates. These unique displays of affection were intensely rewarded and served as a constant reinforcement whenever I felt discouraged or frustrated.

Despite all the stress, teaching students with different needs consistently reminded me of why I became a teacher. When I saw a student, who spent hours and hours trying hard to learn something and then finally get good results and success, I forget all about the challenges of the profession. Based on this incident, DS ignited me to think that isolated special education teachers experience more burnout and attrition than regular teachers do, effective inclusion teachers tend to describe themselves as tolerant, flexible, and prepared to take responsibility for all their students. These successful teachers' colleagues and administrators found them to be good collaborators who exuded warmth and sincerity in their interactions with students. I am not sure how things would have turned out if I had stuck with general education, but I never had doubt that I made the right choice to be an inclusive teacher.

7. We love you more than you ever imagine.

This is one of the best lessons I learned. My students taught me how to love unconditionally without judgments or biases through this incident below:

I was assigned to help a young boy (Mathew) diagnosed with autism. I was told that he had high sensory issues, his social skills weren't the best and his natural attention span was almost nonexistent. At one moment I thought, was he hysterical. This boy could memorize anything and everything he heard from another person, the radio or television. Imagine being in a reading

lesson or someone starts singing a song by one of his classmates, he could repeat it and it was amazing.

Over time, I was able to help him academically because I decided to turn all his lessons into songs, games and character plays (I, myself, as a child). We laughed and played all the day, danced in the halls so he wouldn't be scared to go to the bathroom, and best of all, we were learning. I learned how to let go, to love and to appreciate, all while he was just trying to be a regular kid. On my last day of this academic year, he placed his little hand on my face. He looked at me and said *"Ms, I love you so much. Please don't ever leave me."* After a pause to hold back my tears, he jumped into my arms and gave me such a strong hug. He asked me not to cry. *"It's okay,"* he said. *"Don't cry. If you cry, then I will also cry."* Naturally, I lost it. I don't think I ever realized just how much I had impacted his life; I was too focused on how much good he contributed to mine.

DS enlightened me to realize teaching in this way is not just a matter of how we respond to children after they do something wrong, it's all about the countless gestures that let them know we're glad to see them, that we trust and respect them, that we care about what happens to them. It's about the unconditional respect we express by asking all students what they think about how things are going, and how we might do things differently, not the selective reinforcement we offer to some students when they please us. Accepting students as they are is integrally related to the idea of teaching the whole child. That connection is highlighting because the phrase whole child is sometimes explained to mean more than academics, which suggests a fragmented education. The point is not just to meet a student's emotional needs with the activity, her

physical needs with the activity, her social needs with something else, and so on. Rather, it is an integrated self to whom we respond. It is a whole person whom we value. And to do so in any way that always matters is to accept children unconditionally with love and motive.

8. Attitudes decide the creative strategy

This incident happened in 2007. A student teacher of mine was teaching in a sixth-grade classroom. She received a new student (Geo) who was in a motorized wheelchair and the student could not use his arms. He wrote by holding a pencil in his mouth. The student had amazing penmanship. My student teacher thought that this student was an outsider. He was new to the school, new to the class, had multiple disabilities, and was in 6th grade, which can be a very difficult time for making new friends. Instead of just leaving the situation alone or wishing it were different, my student teacher tried to know the new student. After a few days, she asked him if he would be willing to explain to the class how he could write by holding the pencil in his mouth and if he would be willing to teach the other students and allow them to try. To her delight, he agreed enthusiastically. So, the student created an entire lesson about writing with the mouth. The same two things that matter when you are holding a pencil in your hands are the same two things that matter when you are holding a pencil in your mouth: grip and pressure. The students spent a significant amount of time trying to write with their mouths and seeing his amazing penmanship was mind-blowing to these kids. After that one 30-minute lesson, that student was forever a part of that class community. He was suddenly an expert at something very difficult. He was given status and seen in a whole new way. He was no longer perceived as broken. He was cool!

From DS I understood that, attitude toward disability is the cognitive and behavioral processes that involve judgment and favorable/unfavorable reactions to aspects of disability. Negative attitudes make low expectations, discriminatory behaviors, and marginalization of the disabled child, whereas positive attitudes lead to acceptance and promote the integration of the disabled child. The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. The social model puts the focus on the individual's abilities and their unique needs and not on their condition. This approach helps to develop positive attitudes in society. In this incident, my student teacher was not trained in being inclusive. She did not have a sibling or relative with a disability. She didn't even go to the web and ask a question. She was merely an open-minded, open-hearted person who wanted desperately to find a way to have this new student become a part of the class community. She found it. In fact, the lesson was so successful that when it came time for a group project the next week and someone needed to make a game board, the student with the disability was asked to make it for his group! He was delighted to do it. His group decided he was the best at art in his group. Incredible! Inclusion really does make us all better.

9. Being a good listener and remaining calm is a successful strategy

I had a new admission in my class in 2012. A 10-year-old boy with several disabilities. This student had difficulty with accepting and following the classroom rules and routines at the beginning of the school year, mainly due to the unfamiliar environment. For instance, he used to sit at his seat during the break time and he rarely participated in classroom activities. Making friends and socializing with other individuals was another difficulty he faced during the

beginning of the year. Since he was not completely verbal, communicating with him was quite challenging and a variety of visual aids were required. Despite the behavioral issues, such as biting and screaming at moments of discomfort, he was a very bright and lovely student in our classroom. My interactions with him were a valued learning experience in dealing with aggressive physical contact and practicing remaining calm when they are having behavioural issues.

After-school hours, I worked extra time with him for individual training. Academically, he started with simple tasks such as tracing the alphabet letters and counting by twos, however, after working with this student, he became capable of reading the first level readers books, perfectly writing single sentences with the correct spelling and has learned numbers in Mathematics. I felt that identifying the child's needs and characteristics was one of the main challenges at the beginning of the year. Another main challenge was staying calm and patient during the times in which the kids were experiencing behaviour escalations. For instance, some students make physical contact, such as biting and pushing teachers and even their classmates during their behaviour outbursts. In such cases, it is very important to stay calm and manage that situation patiently in order to avoid tensions and injury. Learning to deal with situations in which students refused to follow rules or listen to instructions is also very important and requires lots of patience and practice.

In addition to providing one-on-one assistance, teachers are expected to engage in multitasking activities in order to help more than one student at the same time. Due to the diverse range of disabilities among the students, each student has different needs. Hence, teachers must

adapt to each student's needs and provide assistance accordingly. Some students learn better through visual aids and demonstrations, whereas others might be more comfortable in listening. Also, some students might learn more effectively when working in a team, as opposed to others who may learn better when working individually.

One of the most important lessons I have learned through this experience is that my responsiveness leads to noticeable change. I believe that listening to students and giving your heart to them by devoting your time and energy is extremely important and makes a great difference in their learning experience. Students function more or less effectively depending on the situation. For example, a student, especially one with different needs, who has witnessed or has been subjected to domestic violence is less likely to concentrate on school work or express expected behaviours. DS empowered me to realize that, in such instances it is very important to first seek the reason behind their misbehaviour, and secondly, to assure that the student is in a healthy emotional and mental state. When we relieve students of their struggles, we rob them of opportunities to build self-confidence, along with knowledge. But when we value mistakes as learning opportunities and allow students to experience puzzlement, learning can increase.

10. Meenu's story (My most challenging student)

Meenu was another student who made me differentiate my pedagogies during my experience in the inclusive classroom. She was one of the oldest young students in the school. She came to the school when she was 14 years old. She had challenging behavior and almost all the staff of the school felt very worried and terrified in front of her because she was very aggressive and

could hurt anyone around her. When Meenu became violent she was also very frightening to others. I decided to take her into my class and I requested specifically to have her in my classroom. I knew that this case would be a difficult one but on the other hand I took it as a challenge. I would have an opportunity to show my colleagues that even with very challenging students like Meenu, a committed teacher can work and make changes in the behaviour. I planned a meeting with her parents. Her father informed me that she loves to be on the bus because it takes her outside. I understood that the bus is the only vehicle that takes her outside to the world.

The first days with Meenu were very difficult. The first aim that I had for her was to leave the bus a little earlier every day. At first, I travelled with her in the same bus and sat with her to develop a trusting relationship with her before I reinforced proper social behaviour. It was very difficult for her to leave the bus. She was not aware of personal boundaries; she injured herself and hurt me as well. I continued to work with her and set personal boundaries. I showed her very clearly which behavior was acceptable and not acceptable in society. She continued her behaviour even after I explained to her. I decided that it would be better for her to be calm. With constant effort she started to change slowly and seemed to be happy and she wanted to leave the bus in order to meet her teacher and her classmates.

Meenu's family was very friendly and very supportive. They were very happy to give me some insights about her behaviour. Parents shared with me about her daily routine and I understood that she had not learned to behave. They did not invite or participate in any social events due to her behaviour. They never took her with them for any functions because she used

to be frustrated and angry, which humiliated them in society. The parents were very depressed and struggling to train her to behave with people. At home, Meenu used to do whatever she liked and if anyone stopped her, she behaved violently. Thus, they decided not to push her too much and just try to make her feel happy. When Meenu was told for the first time that she must learn how to behave and must also learn what is permitted and what is not, her parents, did not feel confident that she could be changed. I explained to her parents the consequences for the future if Meenu would continue to do whatever she wanted and I realized that this was the first time that someone talked to them very honestly about their daughter.

In the first days I understood that Meenu sought some attention in order to show her love. She started getting out of the bus without a problem when I was there and with some problems when I was not there. I used to sing with her and gave more attention to her. We used to draw things with our hands and we used to dance a lot. I noticed her behaviour was changing, and her parents said the same.

After the initial changes in Meenu's behavior I thought that it was the time to start her socialization skills with the rest of the team. My worries were mainly about her responses. I decided that the best place for her to start socialization would be a park, next to school, a place where it would be safe for all. All my worries were unnecessary. The child was very happy. She started walking around and singing songs that she loved. She did not create any inconvenience or problem. After some time, she sat next to me and wanted me to give her more personal attention. She seemed to be very relaxed.

Half an hour before we left, she noticed a young family with their two kids enjoying the park. The kids were playing with their beautiful pink Barbie toy. Meenu saw that cute Barbie. Unfortunately, her mood changed. She persistently demanded that toy. I tried to convince her it belongs to them and not a good behavior to demand it, but she rejected my advice and continued with her demand. When my decision was against her interest, she started to hit and injure both herself and me. I took her hand firmly and brought her to our bus. While returning to the school, she continued with her inappropriate behaviour.

When we returned to the school, all my colleagues saw her and all of them started saying how it was a big mistake to take her outside and that this might have caused me some injury as well. I closed my ears and I went to class where she was crying and she was showing me her tears. I did not know how to react. On the one hand I thought that it would be better if I left her there crying without paying any attention to her. On the other, I decided that it would be proper to go next to her, hug her and tell her that what she did was wrong and she must not do anything like that in the future. I finally did that and Meenu became very happy and relaxed. When I left the school that day, I was wondering whether I should take her to the socialization program again or just leave her in school and go with the rest of the team. I decided that according to my principles I should provide Meenu another chance next week.

The following week, we would visit a shop near the school. I was afraid of Meenu's behavior but I did not say anything to anyone. I talked to her before we left the school about how her behavior must be the right one this time. I believed that she understood what I said to her, because during this visit to the shop she was excellent. I held her hand all the time. She did not

make any problem. She saw a lot of chocolates and she wanted to buy some chocolates which she loved. I said she could not buy the chocolates and we continued our walk without any problem. She was excellent on all the other visits we did during the year, when I was next to her. I tried to have my colleague walk with her some days but she started complaining that she wanted me. Meenu started to be more patient, less violent, and she started socializing.

A last example of Meenu's socialization comes from her sister's engagement ceremony. Her family decided they wanted to take Meenu with them. Two days before the function I got a telephone call from her mother, asking me to join them at the restaurant. I worried that it would not be professional for me to join them. But on the other hand, I decided that this was a very good example to show them what their child can do and show them ways they could behave to help her. We went out and Meenu was amazing. She even took her plate and went with me in order to be served. Her father was surprised and could not believe what he was seeing. She ate properly and she used a tissue as well. At that time, I felt very proud of my work. The most aggressive character of the school (which is how some colleagues used to label Meenu) became a student. I think that the only thing that Meenu wanted from the others was to respect her and value her. This was the recipe for Meenu's progress.

DS helped me to get a thorough understanding of the social model of disability, which forms the basis of the inclusive movement by advocating for the removal of barriers to full participation in society. Now I realized the school environment is considered a contributing factor when students experience a barrier to learning. Lack of progress should be presented as a lack of support provided to the student. Disability is a natural part of the human experience.

Disability acceptance rather than awareness is embedded within the curriculum. Schools should actively engage with social issues regarding disability through anti-ableist curricula and the inclusion of disabled students. Social connections, networks and relationships are highly valued and are facilitated between all students. Disabled students are encouraged to socialise with their peers.

11. Tom at his zone of proximal development

Tom was the student in my grade seven class who had the most severe learning problems. In psychological assessments, Tom was variously described as being delayed, having a visual processing disorder, weak working memory, an auditory processing disorder, cognitive disability, and an acquired brain injury. From his parents, I knew that Tom was somewhat delayed in meeting many of the milestones for infants and toddlers. He was described as quiet and cooperative and a child who responded well to encouragement. Tom was never at the top of the social ladder of popularity with his peers but he was never at the bottom. He had friendships with everybody. The comments on Tom's reports described him as having a positive attitude, wanting to please others, being responsive to directions from the teacher, and being respectful. Tom is described as kind, well-liked by peers, pleasant, and someone who enjoys participating in group activities.

Tom described his learning difficulty as, *"I have a hard time in reading, I couldn't read at all. It was hard, I couldn't write and I didn't know how to spell."* At times Tom would get so frustrated that he would bang his head with his fists or against a wall and say, *"I hate my brain"*.

He tended to make poor decisions, be reactive without thinking first, and needed external support to calm down. His mom once said that, Tom's academic experience as a mainstreamed student in elementary school as, "everything is hard, every day, and you are never good at anything."

Due to the severity of Tom's cognitive processing issues, I planned and implemented the individualized learning programme during after school hours. There were three more students along with him. The after-school classroom was as calm and quiet as anything he could ever see. It was a calmer, quieter routine, a lot like a home. He thrived in that kind of environment where it was individualized for him: he felt comfortable; he was able to be in an environment where he could work to his ability; there was something he could always do with a goal; the classroom was completely encouraging; they cheered him on when he met his goal so he made progress. This individualized programme was working on each student's level of performance with respect to their cognitive function area. This practice is consistent with Vygotsky's (1981) conceptualization of the zone of proximal development and how pushing the limits of the individual's current functioning with incremental steps can promote growth and learning. I worked at this level with increasingly more difficult tasks until he reached a level of mastery and then moved on to the next level. Reaching mastery can take a few days in some cases or much longer in other cases. Tom responded very positively to reaching mastery. In his words "*It felt exciting...I liked it because I could tell it had gotten easier and each time I mastered, it seemed like I could do it faster*". He started after-school hours in September and it was Christmas when I realized that he was not wanting to bang his head anymore which is a big, big thing over that first year what disappeared was "I hate my brain". The school progress report described Tom as joyful and having increased in volunteering his ideas, and independence. Tom is taking regular

programming with some modifications in high school in every class. He has moved on to high school with his peers that have been together since kindergarten. Tom has improved in his independent reading skills and the neatness of his writing.

In this incident, I worked out the individualized learning program for Tom, even without knowing much about its theoretical background. Based on my self-evaluation it was a very successful inclusive pedagogical strategy. My graduate courses at U of M helped me to rethink the influence of the medical and social models of disability on this strategy. Now I realized that the diagnosis of a disabled child is very much the medical model of disability. In contrast to the medical model, the social model makes changes to the environment in which the child lives. The child's needs are focussed on rather than their diagnosis. Their strengths and weaknesses as well as external influences such as the child's background and history are taken into account in order to find a suitable method of teaching, which, in time will help the child reach their full potential. It should be noted that one model is not seen as a superior to the other as both models have their advantages and disadvantages. The medical model focuses on curing the disability in order to include the person within society, whereas the social model's focus is on the changing of society and human attitudes with the aim of improving the life of the disabled person, making it easier for the person to gain an education and carry out day-to-day activities. The identification processes are diverse with the medical model and the social model by way of observation and collaboration. Responding to a disabled child under the medical model, labels the child as assuming they need specialist education, with the hope of remediation. In contrast, the social model embraces the child, removing the barriers to achievement by responding to the child's individual needs, underpinning inclusion. Hence the medical model works as the basis for

rehabilitation and remedial programmes; and therefore, the elements of both models can be used sensibly for the long-term health, education and well-being of the disabled child.

12. Sam really deserves it!

Sam had academic difficulties in all subjects but was weakest in math. He had several comments on the progress reports in his cumulative folder indicating he needs to make better use of class time, be more consistent, and needs to ask for help. He was a very active and friendly child who had emotional/behavioural problems. The assessment report says behaviour problems started in kindergarten.

His greatest strengths were that he was a kind and friendly child; he had great social skills, and was very polite. He also had strong computer skills and worked hard on organizing himself when prompted. Sam had good verbal comprehension and reasoning. I also noticed he was establishing a personal voice in his writing and was more focused on using concrete words and images to convey his attitude or feelings towards a topic. I believed his greatest strength was his writing ability; he really liked to write things and sometimes he could not get words out when talking. Talking sometimes was not very easy for him. In school I felt like he really succeeded in classes that were hands-on or had a lot of writing. There were quite a few difficulties he faced at school and of those difficulties his stutter made it very hard to do anything oral in school, such as giving answers aloud, reading from the textbook or reading aloud. Another difficulty he had in school was the distractions in class; he needed sometimes to be by himself to do independent work.

I started to help him by allowing him less stressful situations for speaking orally. Consciously I never created situations for him to talk aloud in front of the class and I gave a lot of independent work and he needed to be away from distractions. On tests and worksheets, he needed some extra time to complete. When given new concepts in math, it was important to break it down and that gave Sam the opportunity to practice the new skill. Once he gained the confidence, he was then able to take this new skill and apply it when working on word problems. I noticed how this shy, unsure boy tried to navigate in new learning activities with confidence and he could be free to take risks in a safe environment. Sam advocated for others who were being bullied, taking a stand because no one did that for him. I watched Sam's face; I could see his biggest challenge while sharing his experiences with being bullied because of his stutter. After two months, he expressed his interest to participate in a panel discussion. It was a great wonder for me. He was selected as one of five students to sit on the panel and share their story. The pride that I felt that day will never be forgotten. Sam recognized that being a student with a lot of learning difficulties was not his ticket to an easy life. He understood and accepted that he has to work even harder to make sure his success. This is something Sam relies on when his stutter becomes challenging and now, he sees it as one of his greatest strengths. I observed this boy become a confident child and I realized that my different approach had a great role in Sam's journey. I am so confident that Sam will be on the right track for success in life. Yes, he certainly deserves it!

From the perspective of DS, I got a clear understanding about an inclusive learning environment requiring more patience and persistence to undo students' discouragement and frustration and help them regain the willingness to challenge themselves. At first they will need

more support and encouragement and smaller, more reachable goals so that they can recognize their successes. Teachers should help them set challenging but realistic and achievable goals, then scaffold the strategies that are compatible with how their brains learn most successfully. Teachers can acquire this information through observation and formal and informal assessments of students' learning styles and strengths. Through progress charting, teachers can help students see the connection between their efforts and their improvement. Eventually, students will build the resilience that comes with knowing that their own efforts are powerful enough to overcome obstacles and attain meaningful goals. Teachers can then turn students' newfound confidence and self-esteem toward other academic, social, and behavioral goals that seemed unreachable when these students felt discouraged and disparaged.

13. Technology is Evan's strength

Evan is a bright student but he had such a hard time in learning to spell and read. He demonstrated an ability to comprehend but his weak reading and spelling skills meant that despite his hard work, he never received a good grade. In school, he found it most difficult to write or spell words. He also found it difficult to manage his time in large assignments and difficult to stay focused while he was reading. Some of his greatest strengths were in the areas of verbal memory and expression. He was able to express his knowledge much better and he succeeded in class discussions or presentations. He was dramatic and confident in his verbal abilities.

I felt that Evan is a bright, keen and dedicated learner who benefits from oral instructions and visual aids to reinforce expectations. He was an auditory learner who has incredible expressive language abilities. He needs support to manage his time to do his assignments. When he received a project, we (me and Evan) worked together to break it down into manageable chunks so that he was able to meet his deadlines. Evan struggled with spelling, conventions and organization of ideas but had been incredibly successful in school through the use of assistive software to express his ideas and his ability to advocate for himself and others. He was an auditory learner so he benefited from having his textbooks on his computer. This technology assistance helped him a lot to express his ideas in word form. The pedagogy that I used to help him to succeed are creating checklists with deadlines to keep him organized and to manage his time more appropriately so that he does not feel stressed when he had a large assignment. Additionally, I found that making mind maps helped him to collect his thoughts and make connections, allowing him to understand all the knowledge he had and how it fits into both the bigger and smaller picture. Through this differentiated strategy, I noticed that he was able to articulate clearly what type of learner he was and what he needed in order to be successful.

After DS, I appreciated that technology can be especially helpful with disabled students. Access to computers, screen readers, and voice recognition software can help many such students and they can use technology more effectively. Other educational software programs—such as talking dictionaries and talking word processing applications—provide opportunities for students to improve their spelling, reading and writing.

14. Ann succeeded from a different learning environment

At the beginning of the year, Ann had a lot of difficulty staying on task. It was very challenging to evaluate her comprehension in subjects such as mathematics because she didn't stay on task for long. She made a lot of disruptive noises during class. She did not realize that she was making noises and she had strong difficulty to concentrate. Her belongings took up a lot of space on her desk, or her place of work. She did not have any practice to organize her learning materials. She took a lot of time to find her worksheets. Sometimes she found herself engaging in unsafe activities during PT such as kicking a ball while the game was stopped.

However, Ann is good in oral communication, motor skills and has good relationships with others. She was always looking to help others, whether it was the little kids or staff members. She had an excellent vocabulary in Malayalam (regional language), which allows her to easily understand verbal directions. She used her comprehension of the language to actively participate in lessons or group discussions. She had a good logical-mathematical sense that allowed her to solve fairly complex problems. Her knowledge of basic math skills also assisted with more complicated and difficult concepts. Ann learned how to handle situations in a better way. Her kinesthetic strengths helped her during science and physical education classes.

I understood that she liked to have information through touching, creating something and through movement activities. I decided to guide her in reading and writing through strategies that are powerful for kinesthetic learners. The best strategies I used with Ann were, hands on movement activities and story making through jigsaw puzzles. She enjoyed and performed well

in that activity. In addition to that I gave more time to her to read passages or fewer passages to read because she was typically a slow reader and gave more time to complete written assignments as it often took her longer to get her thoughts down on paper. I provided real life examples of verbal concepts and provided a rich language environment with numerous opportunities to engage in small group role playing and speaking activities. In addition to that she needed reminders to help her stay on task, to organize herself, or to remain focused. I suggested to her to remove the items that distracted her from her desk. I created situations to experience successes (even small ones) to gain confidence and the desire to succeed again, to persevere and to live more. I believed that a successful pedagogy must start with an awareness of the strength and difficulties of learners and to implement some fundamental strategies to overcome the difficulties by utilizing their areas of strength.

It is important to realize that the way someone learns is not an indicator of intelligence or capabilities. Two people of similar levels of intelligence may learn best using two different styles of learning. While there are no indications that one learning style is better than another, it is true that certain teaching methods and modalities favor certain learning styles. In order to teach these diverse groups, it is necessary to understand different learning styles and modify the teaching to meet the needs of all of the students. Now I understood that what makes teachers true educators depends on their acknowledgment, appreciation, and respect of students' differences. Students' diverse intelligences, talents, skills, interests, and backgrounds enrich our classroom and our lives as teachers. It is true that –No two students are the same, and no individual student has the same response to every learning situation.

CONCLUSION

Through the above reflection of my critical incidents, I could evaluate my differentiated teaching and learning strategies that have occurred—reconstructs, re-enacts, and recaptures the events, the emotions and the accomplishments. I believe reflection is an important part of professional development and teachers must learn to observe outcomes and determine the reasons for success or failure. It helps to confront contradictions between my thinking and practice, and promote a conceptual change in my views about teaching which is a fundamental phase in developing inclusive pedagogy. It is more than a self-awareness process in which I think back after something has happened. The moment I start reflecting upon a situation, naturally begins to raise questions about how that happened? Why it happened that way? Could it be different? Answers to these questions leads to narrative development of the above fourteen critical incident stories. These reflective thoughts about my teaching shifts from thinking about a sequence of chronological events to purposeful thinking to identify how to improve specific learning situations especially from the context of diverse learners and meeting the specific needs of children with diverse abilities.

At the beginning stages of my inclusive approaches, my colleagues were not supportive initially. They made comments like “If she uses after school hours; gradually it becomes a rule that we must follow, so please don’t try to modify the system in the school”. “Why do you spend too much extra time for these kids, they will not change.” Such prejudiced attitude is a great barrier to an inclusive approach. When my differentiated approach led to positive results, they started to realize that disabled children can succeed in many learning interactions.

CHAPTER 6: IDEALS AND REALITIES OF INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

INTRODUCTION

The policies and laws of India have enabled inclusion of disabled children and their enrollment in regular schools. The *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016* (RPD Act) mandates inclusive education and stipulates that disabled children be admitted in all educational institutes without discrimination and provided with an environment that maximizes academic and social development with the goal of full inclusion. One of the major contemporary challenges for teachers is the continuous search for pedagogy and approaches to meet the diversity in inclusive classrooms. Ideas of inclusion assume that every pupil has equitable access to education and that schools organize learning spaces that accommodate everyone in the spirit of universal design. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) have distinguished among inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education and inclusive practice as the term inclusive is a broad term in education that has many meanings. Inclusive education stands for the process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion. Inclusive pedagogy focuses on how teachers understand the concept of inclusion and how to teach in inclusive schools. Inclusive practice, however, stands for what people actually do in schools to give the concept of inclusion meaning in their practice of teaching. Real classrooms are no longer a homogenous group because every child is different in terms of socio-cultural differences, language, gender and human diversity. Hence a teacher needs to be aware of what are the areas of diversity and how they overlap and affect a child's learning to address the needs of diverse learners. I think these philosophies are the ideals behind the perception of inclusive pedagogy. The different discussions in various courses in the past two years of the interdisciplinary master's programme in Disability Studies at the University

of Manitoba empowered me to get more awareness about the ideological aspects of inclusive pedagogy based on the approach of social model.

IDEALS OF INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy includes the act of teaching and the ideas, values and beliefs informing, sustaining and justifying that act (Alexander, 2015). The term pedagogy appears in the educational literature to explain the disparate and complex issues of the teaching profession. Three consistent uses of the term ‘pedagogy’ can be found in the literature; (a) to cover teaching methods, instructional programs and curricula; (b) as an all-embracing term for education in poststructuralist thought; and (c) to express and address moral education and discourse about teaching and learning (Bruner, 1996). A fundamental assumption in the inclusive pedagogy approach is based on rejecting ability labelling as a deterministic notion of fixed ability that has historically underpinned the structure of education (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre (2004) identified three fundamental pedagogical principles necessary for the development of inclusive practices. To begin with, there is the principle that relates to the responsibility the teacher has towards his/her pupils, in the sense that the teacher is responsible for and committed to the education of all the pupils in the classroom, not just some of them. The second principle addresses co-agency, where the pupil is seen as an active agent in his/her education and there is interplay between the teacher and the pupil. The teacher creates learning spaces for the pupils, but the pupils are responsible for their learning with support from the teacher. The last principle is that of trust, in that the teacher trusts that pupils want to learn and does not blame them when they do not learn.

By incorporating pedagogical knowledge, understanding and skills into practice, an opportunity to differentiate among pupils, contexts, methods, materials, resources and outcomes is created in designing a curriculum for all pupils. Ideals of inclusive pedagogy emphasizes that all students should have full access to course materials and the importance of teachers being transparent about their assessment criteria. The practice of teaching diverse groups of pupils is grounded in a pedagogy that includes more than skill in using prescribed instructional practices. Rather, this practice integrates professional knowledge about teaching, learning and child development, and involves an ethical and social commitment to children.

According to Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) report (1999) in an inclusive learning environment the pedagogy should promote the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning style and language. It is free of discrimination, segregation and harassment. The major ideological aspects of inclusive pedagogy, based on the different literature, can be summarized as:

- Educating societies to accommodate learners with a diversity of educational needs in order to support these learners to actualise their full potential.
- Employing teachers who focus not on the barriers but on what must be implemented in order to learn more effectively.
- Developing genuine respect for all people by treating everybody as dignified human beings.
- Acknowledging, supporting and encouraging the equal rights of all learners to participate in the learning and teaching process.

- Offering a range of learning contexts which offer diversity in terms of curriculum and mechanisms to address barriers to learning and development.
- Developing a flexible curriculum that meets the diverse needs of the learner population.
- Drawing on the different support services available in the teaching and learning context to the mutual benefit of all.
- Learners are respected for what they are and not for what others and the community expect of them.
- No labelling.
- No exclusion from educational opportunities

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

The practices of inclusive pedagogy are based on the premise that education systems and schools assume responsibility for organizing curriculum and teaching around a diverse group of pupils in such a way that the learning environment is appropriate for the pupils' inherent resources. All pupils bring valuable resources and experiences to the classroom. These resources are their talents, strengths and skills, built upon their personal experience, knowledge and beliefs. Teachers who understand their pupils' resources can better adapt their teaching resources to what pupils bring to the classroom.

Being flexible, responsive, committed to each pupil, and using a variety of teaching approaches creates an opening to effectively educate a diverse group of pupils according to their resources and funds of knowledge. Furthermore, teachers who develop a deep personal knowledge of each student can obtain the necessary discretion to differentiate the learning

among pupils. Important elements of teaching approaches that provide an opportunity for all pupils to succeed involves comprehensive and systematic ways to gather information about pupils, connections between learning and pupils' lives, and a focus on flexibility and open-endedness of the curricula. A flexible curriculum with alternatives gives teachers a chance to respond to the differences in each class. The classroom and the teaching are structured in a way that offers mixed-ability teaching with alternative ways of learning and working and multiple opportunities for success. For teachers who want to respond to diverse learners in effective ways, this is a never-ending pathway, but each step taken towards progress in inclusion.

Responsiveness, coupled with pedagogical skills, enables teachers to use pupil differences, contextual issues, and problems and challenges in the pedagogy as opportunities for effective teaching and learning. However, responsive teachers go beyond acknowledging and respecting differences and they focus on pupils and what they bring into the classroom in the shape of their resources (ability, attitude, background, experience, interest, knowledge, and skills), and respond by designing a universal learning environment that supports all pupils in expanding their learning. Responsive teachers are skilled in creating a curriculum of learning activities and environments in which all pupils have the opportunity to succeed.

To respond to pupils' diversity, the teacher builds the planning on flexible and alternative approaches from the beginning, and creates an environment that gives pupils opportunities to learn in different ways. Thus, responsive teachers' comprehensive grounding in pedagogy enables them to (a) base their teaching on detailed knowledge of each pupil, (b) construct learning activities that are both challenging and enjoyable, (c) differentiate among pupils within

integrated curricula and programs, (d) use the physical and social environment to support learning, (e) support pupils to develop a growing sense of responsibility for their learning, and (f) work in partnership with pupils to monitor and modify teaching, learning and assessment (Florian, 2014). Research indicates that our current educational systems, classrooms, and instructional methodologies are not effective in fostering engagement and inclusion for diverse learners because our learning environments are not designed with a deep understanding of individual variability (Katz, 2013; Meyer et al., 2014; Wilson, 2017). There is a “strong disconnect between the philosophy behind inclusion policies and their everyday classroom implementation” (Towle, 2015, p. 24). Educators need to be better equipped and trained to provide for more diverse classrooms (Towle, 2015). Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) note: A desire for more training in using differentiated instruction and UDL (Universal Design for Learning) was one example given (Thompson et al., 2015). UDL provides a framework for the relevant and practical application of inclusive pedagogy, thus facilitating the academic and social inclusion and engagement for all students (Katz, 2013).

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY IN INDIA

In India, the number of disabled people is so large, their problems so complex, available resources so scarce and social attitudes so damaging. The road to achieving education through inclusive pedagogy is a long and varied one, on which different barriers and opportunities will arise. India is a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious country, and its people are stratified along sharp socio-economic and caste lines. The aim of inclusive pedagogy is to bring support to students, including those who have different needs. The key purpose has become more challenging as schools accommodate students with increasingly diverse backgrounds and

abilities. The *Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016*, which mandates inclusive education, stipulates that children with disabilities be admitted in all educational institutes without discrimination and provided with an environment that maximizes academic and social development with the goal of full inclusion. Although the Government of India has attempted to create policies that are inclusive for people with disabilities, their implementation efforts have not resulted in an inclusive system of education. Das, Kuyini and Desai (2013) examined the current skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, India to teach disabled students in inclusive education settings. They reported that nearly 70% of the regular school teachers had neither received training in special education nor had any experience teaching disabled students. Further, 87% of the teachers did not have access to support services in their classrooms. Disabled children are often an easy target for being teased and bullied by their non-disabled peers. Most of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programs for disabled students in regular schools. Most teacher training programs in India do not have a unit on Disability Studies (Myreddi & Narayan, 2000). The majority of schools in India are poorly designed and few are equipped to meet the unique needs of disabled students. It is also worth noting that there are barriers around procuring and resourcing for assistive devices. Despite various efforts for inclusive education in India, about 94% of children with disabilities did not receive any educational services. The commitment of the Government of India to Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) cannot be fully achieved without taking care of different educational needs of physically and mentally disabled children. Inclusion is becoming a cant and doing the rounds in education circles but there are still a lot of cobwebs surrounding it.

REALITIES OF MY PEDAGOGY

“The inclusive classrooms must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational, arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities” (UNESCO, 2005, Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, p.11-12). In the past few years, all these provisions were only on paper. The true inclusive education in India is lacking due to various barriers that interfere with its successful implementation in primary classrooms. In this chapter I tried to uncover my struggles that I experienced as an inclusive teacher while implementing my differentiated strategies (which I explained in chapter 5) in various learning situations. The major barriers that I confront with my inclusive pedagogy in the elementary classrooms are:

Addressing Socio-cultural Barriers Influencing Learning:

The environment of the home in which a child is raised, and the larger social environment outside of the home, all influence the development and learning of a child. Cultures and social groups are also characterized by particular ways of thinking. Some theories of learning and thinking propose that individuals learn ways of thinking directly in their social interactions with others, particularly when they are engaged in solving socially defined problems. They internalize this activity and later use the newly-learned mental processes by themselves, without the support of others; cognitive development is the conversion of social relations into mental functions. (Vygotsky, 1981). The socio-cultural factors have implications to children with disabilities and other children from diverse background in the class. I realized that each student learns about the world and how to behave according to the rules and values of their culture. The learner applies

these rules in the same way in the classroom. It is a great barrier for me to be unaware of what kind of cultural values the learners have. Based on that a teacher must be careful to not over-generalize or stereotype a student based on the cultural norm of his/her ethnicity.

Barriers of Diversities and Individual Differences

India is a country of huge diversity and now with a population that is more and more mobile the students in our classroom will be diverse in many ways. Diversity in the classroom takes multiple forms. The most common diversities involve individual difference in background, levels of preparation, learning styles, interests, attitude, aptitude and abilities rather than diversity in demographic or group terms, such as age, class, culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. To be an effective teacher, it is important to understand how individual children take in and process information. Not all children learn the same way. In a class of diverse students there are also individual differences amongst the disabled children. Developing an inclusive curriculum is a transformative process for the instructor and the students. It entails a paradigm shift in which basic assumptions are examined and changed. Thus, undertaking the learning activities requires desire, curiosity, willingness to travel into unknown pedagogical terrain, and patience with oneself and with one's students. Disabled children had entered the class with diagnoses such as Autism, specific learning disabilities, Down's syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, and teachers need to avoid making assumptions about students with a disability based solely on the diagnosis. The diagnosis may help to give a broad understanding of the accommodation that might be required for that child, but may not give insight into more specific and individual difference. For example, a student with Autism may have difficulty with writing but another child in the same class who also has Autism may not. The diagnosis should not limit any child to

full participation in their education. Teaching such diverse groups of students mean, teaching can be exciting and will require some amount of planning. It is true that fostering diversity is an idea which is consistent with some of our most enduring national ideals, such as respect for the right of each individual to pursue life in their own fashion, promoting these ideals in the classroom can often prove very difficult.

Accessibility Barriers

Accessibility factors extend beyond the boundaries of the school and classroom. The barriers faced by children with disability in learning are not due to their disability but the lack of effective participation in their educational life. The lack of participation can be for many reasons. A major reason for lack of participation is poverty. Where there is poverty with disability, the situation is aggravated even more. Poverty is a cause and a consequence of disability. In a situation of poverty children with disability are even less likely to access schooling or any kind of therapy. I experienced those children from poorer households, from a minority religion and who had an uneducated head of household had lower access to schools. I felt that disability is a strong predictor in granting access to school. Socioeconomic status, parental education, gender and even household size all impact access to school for children. Despite the free public education available to all citizens, access to education is unequal among many children and further compounded by environmental and socioeconomic factors. The causal link between disability and access to school is not a simple linear relationship but multidimensional and includes multiple factors. I understood that parents' income and level of education influence educational attainment of children or even the decision to send children to school. In the case of children with disabilities, household poverty and parents' level of education, but also parents'

attitudes (e.g., beliefs about capacity of children to learn), violence, child labour, disability type (e.g., developmental vs. intellectual vs. acquired from harm), discrimination in the school environment (e.g., bullying, inclusive atmosphere), all impact both access and attendance in school.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about disabled people. Some examples of attitudinal barriers are, assuming a disabled child is inferior, assuming that a child with a speech impairment cannot understand others, making a child feel as though you are doing them a special favour. The most significant challenge to the inclusive classroom is the attitudes of administrators, parents, teachers and students. The attitudes and abilities of general education teachers and para-educators in particular can be major limitations in the inclusive classroom. The training of teachers and para-educators to understand and work with children with disabilities is often inadequate, or it may be fragmented and uncoordinated. If educators have negative attitudes toward disabled students or have low expectations of them, it will affect the pedagogy and there by children will unlikely receive a satisfactory, inclusive education. Attitudinal barriers are the most difficult barriers to overcome yet a teacher can with sensitivity and skill bring about changes.

Curricular Barriers

Just as the environment must be accessible to disabled children, the curriculum must facilitate inclusive pedagogy too. The curriculum and teaching methods used by educators play a pivotal role as far as attaining effective teaching in inclusive classrooms is concerned. One critical barrier to my pedagogy is the curriculum itself. I realized that teaching methods and inaccessible curriculum materials could have an effect on students' learning process. Rather than offering multiple gateways to learning and understanding, the one size fits all printed text-books and other resources that make up the general curriculum often serve as barriers. While conventional materials are reasonably accessible to many students, meanwhile they are a very significant barriers for disabled students. Therefore, a conventional method is sometimes considered a barrier to reaching one's potential. Negative effects on education include aspects such as lack of relevance of subject content; lack of appropriate learning materials, resources and assistive devices; inflexible styles of teaching; classroom management; and inappropriate ways of assessing learning. General educators must be willing to work with resource teachers to make modifications and accommodations in both teaching methods and classroom and homework assignments. For instance, in a curriculum adapted for so-called normal learners, a teacher can teach pupils by writing on the board. However, this is not applicable in the case where some pupils cannot see. The inflexible nature of the curriculum acts as great challenge to inclusive pedagogy which aims at meeting learners' diverse needs.

Language and communication Barriers

Many students are expected to learn while being taught in a language that is new and, in some cases, unfamiliar to them. This is obviously a significant challenge to teachers and students

for their successful learning. Too often, these students face discrimination and low expectations. There is a definite relationship between communication and inclusion. Communication between teacher and student and among students is essential in order to build strong relationships consisting of mutual trust and respect. From a constructivist view of learning, talk is also essential to students' understanding of new information within their existing schema. A pupil with poor speech production will be unable to show her or his understanding in a classroom situation, whether it be in a whole-class question-and-answer session or in small-group situations. An apparent learning difficulty may therefore be caused by this communication difficulty, not a cognitive difficulty. Also, speech production problems will also make it harder for a teacher to ascertain a student's level of prior understanding. A child with speech difficulty will have problems in learning, saying, writing and storing words. Some children have severe word-finding difficulties and this interrupts their language and thought processes. The difficulty in retrieving words is related to problems with how they are stored in their minds. Sounds need to be sequenced and joined to form words, words must be ordered and conjoined to form sentences, and sentences need to be sequenced in order to make spoken or written language have meaning. Pupils with language difficulty may not be capable of putting a sentence together in an appropriate sequence, or a series of sentences together to explain an event or a process. Social communication and interaction, e.g., responding to the verbal or non-verbal cues of others, can be a particular problem in class group work, especially when pupils are carrying out collaborative tasks which require teamwork and cooperation.

Barriers in Learning Environment

An appropriate classroom learning environment is important for successful pedagogy and learning and for ensuring that all students can participate equally in classroom activities.

Appropriate use of lighting and colour can help to create a calming environment. Students who have intellectual or learning disabilities will benefit from a design approach that reduces visual and auditory distractions. Students who have difficulties with memory and concentration may also benefit from reduced distractions. Students who had speech disabilities did not have any alternative ways to communicate with their teachers and their peers. There were no classrooms designed to facilitate the use of computers with assistive technology. For the whole school there was a computer lab with 5 computers. If it works properly, it can be a part of pedagogy. A suitable acoustic environment that avoids or reduces noise distractions will also be helpful. Lighting has a significant impact on the ability of students to concentrate and learn in comfort. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students need clear visibility for lip-reading. Some students may be particularly sensitive to glare. Therefore, it is important to be able to control the sunlight entering a space by installing suitable blinds. Venetian blinds can create lined patterns of light that may be distracting or confusing for some students. A lack of fresh air can cause concentration and drowsiness issues.

Barriers in Classroom Climate

In order for students, including those with disabilities, to feel safe in their class environment, they must feel accepted by their teachers and peers. This implies the need to develop respect for differences. To make this happen, my opinion is that teachers first model an attitude of respect for individual differences. The words and actions presented by the teacher

must reflect the idea that everyone is equal. Directly discussing various types of human diversity, as well as the individual strengths and weaknesses that we all have, can be used to develop a sense of acceptance and understanding. Disabled students should not feel that they are an addition to a general education classroom, but a part of it and they belong there. When teachers make accommodations and support student participation, every child feels respected. Every student needs to be encouraged to participate in all classroom activities and their contributions should be valued. Teachers need to foster mutual respect among all of their students. The rules of the classroom should reflect a positive learning environment that exhibits respect, cooperation, and acceptance. Not all students access information with the same senses, so it is important to present information in multiple modalities. That is, make sure students can both read and listen to the information. Much of the learning in classrooms is structured around reading, understanding and discussing printed materials such as books, newspapers and magazines. If a child cannot read a book because of a visual, cognitive or learning disability, the information in the book should be available in an alternate accessible format that can be used by the child. Making printed information available as large-print documents is a cost-effective way to support the learning of some children with vision loss. In reality there were no such provisions existing to support children having visual difficulty. A quiet environment is therefore critical for maximizing the effectiveness of children with disability in the regular classroom.

Barriers in Selection of Teaching Strategies

Research suggests that training and education are critical to the success of inclusion programs (Winter, 2006). Teachers are feeling ill equipped to teach in an inclusive setting because they feel that they did not receive appropriate training or professional development to properly

implement inclusion into their classrooms. According to Smith, Tyler, and Skow (2003), many general and special education teachers feel that they were not prepared to plan and make adaptations for disabled students. As Winter (2006) states, ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive education is the best investment that can be made. Pre-service preparation is a critical factor in helping teachers formulate their beliefs about inclusion as well as affecting their ability to teach students with disability. When working with students with different needs, I became flexible by using various instructional strategies, especially in an inclusive setting. Disabled students need a variety of modifications made to the curriculum and also require different methods of instruction in order to be successful in an inclusive classroom. It is important that students with different needs are gaining as much access as possible to the general curriculum and age-appropriate activities. By incorporating different types of instructional strategies, modifications to tasks, and peer support strategies in inclusive settings, for the improvement of disabled students. Those students can meet the high standards being set in today's general education classrooms; it is up to teachers to find ways to tap into their potential. Based on my experience, I understood that every teacher needs to be aware of the different forms of diversity to be found among children. These include gender difference, linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity, social-emotional diversity, cognitive and academic diversity and sensory and physical diversity. Many of these diversities are interconnected and also embedded in various contexts.

Barriers in Assessment Procedures

Assessment refers to the ways teachers and other people involved in a pupil's education systematically collect and then use information about that pupil's level of achievement and/or development in different areas of their educational experience (Watkins 2007). Every learner is

unique and should be assessed in their own right with individual consideration to their circumstances. The ultimate goal of educational assessment is to provide an appropriate instructional program for the student to enable them to develop and reach their individual maximum potential. It is acknowledged that evaluation has a direct influence on teaching and learning, and that its power can be connected and directed towards positive outcomes. It is important that pupils with disability derive maximum benefit from assessment to ensure maximum participation in school, and eventually society. I realized that the assessment procedures which are varied from student to student is always challenging and it has a subjective nature too. Among some assessment procedures regarded as inappropriate are, a child who has poor performance on pronunciation, but average reading, is likely a false positive error (Torgersen 2002). It is also important to remember that poor performance on measures of academic achievement is most certainly the evidence of a cognitive deficit. The use of non-standardised or informal assessments, dynamic assessment, behavioural and pragmatic observations in the natural environment (outside of the classroom) as well as spontaneous and structured language sampling also provides important information that standardised tests by themselves may not. It is very important to break away from the performance-oriented perception of assessment when dealing with a learner who has any learning difficulty. My observation is that an inclusive teacher always finds their own assessment methods that take into account the needs of learners with different needs in their classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Since the implementation of an inclusive education policy in schools, mainstream classrooms have become more diverse, including students who have different levels of learning

capability, and those who require direct individualised support. The diversity of students indicates that teachers cannot simply prepare lessons that are suitable for the average students in class, but must aim to include all types of learners. A student's environment can be very influential and crucial for learning. With fixed uniform learning materials teachers are left with the reality of personalizing instruction by providing supplementary adaptations or accommodations for disabled learners. Generally, in reality the instruction is usually standardised and aimed at middle ability range. Wong Kauffman, and Lloyd (2005) state that teachers should be flexible in their approach, differentiate on different levels, focus on strengths of the student, provide clear instructions, challenge the students, monitor individual progress, use multisensory aids, and allow students to learn from one another (cooperative learning).

CHAPTER :7 DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

As an academic teacher as well as a teacher practitioner, I came to identify the demanding roles of the teachers in the inclusive classroom through the pedagogical practices, that are all connected with its ideals. From my years of teaching experience in India, I observed that there is a gap between formulations and realizations of inclusive pedagogical aspects. One of the joys of my teaching career has been witnessing the way the fabric of a class dynamic is woven from the range of abilities of my students. It has been my experience that the diversity of children's abilities brings many barriers, which adds colour and richness to the pedagogy of my teaching, making each class unique and interesting in its own way. Teaching students with an array of abilities, has taught me a great deal about the potential of children and the need of differentiated instruction to overcome barriers.

In my early teaching days, I rushed through each day, trying to get everything done. At the end of the day, I left my classroom, went home, and began my other household jobs. I was happy when everything in my class went great, but I sometimes blamed it on the kids if anything didn't go just as I planned. Purposeful self-reflection was the ultimate thing that I had time for or wanted to do for that matter.

I believe a teacher's self-reflection is used as a vehicle for genuine teacher development. It was a powerful practice that improved my pedagogies. When I began to practice my self-

reflection in the form of anecdotes, I realized the changes that happened in my classroom strategies. Those self-reflections are powerful, painful, humbling, validating, and a thousand other emotions jumbled together. But most importantly, I learned a lot about myself and my students. From my experience, I realized that my classroom is a place where my students widely differ from each other in terms of their level of maturity, intelligence, learning style, interest, aptitude and sense of responsibility.

IMPACT OF DISABILITY STUDIES

For me, Disability Studies has profoundly altered my perception and understanding of disability. This program provides meaningful insight into the world of disability through various social and cultural perspectives. Various courses of this program prompted me to realize conventional and medicalized understandings of the body and mind in order to recognize and promote a more diverse spectrum of humanity. I have been enlightened on a theoretical, as well as philosophical level about the complexities of disability and the body/mind. I will take my understanding of disability throughout my career serving and assisting individuals with disabilities.

Before taking this course, I was ignorant regarding the extent to which our society devalues and excludes people with disabilities, and this course has taught me about the structural oppression and discrimination facing people with disabilities today. In class we talked about how stigma and fear of judgment cause disabled people to often withdraw from social situations- they stop going to restaurants, grocery stores, community centers, programs with other children, church, and other community places of support. Over time it helped me understand how

discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people became entrenched in our institutions and social structures. I learned about how not to behave and act towards people with disabilities.

I come from India and we have the proud history of great musicians, rulers, and philosophers with disabilities however, there is extreme stigma regarding disability and some people still believe that anyone with disability is under the cast of a witch. India's accessibility policy isn't as strong as Canada's policy and people feel ashamed to talk about this issue openly. Hence, families restrain their social interaction and social gatherings which results in a lot of stress and makes the child with disability act awkwardly when placed in social situations. I realized how much we must learn from the policies framed by Canada and Canadian citizens in their world view about disability.

I have a new found respect for Disability Studies and the information I have received in the various courses, I was so fortunate to become a part of. I will take and share the information everywhere as I endeavor to broaden my horizons. I realized the need of practicing the ideas of the social model of disability in my life. I understood that the social model believes in the attitudinal and environmental barriers which are the predominant obstacles existing in society: able-bodied people tend to fix their eyes on the disability of people rather than noticing their abilities. It advocates that place like buildings, schools and play grounds should be made suitable to accommodate people with varying disabilities. It became a tool for supporting the principle of equity and inclusion in society by taking a firm stand that no longer should a person with disability be considered inferior nor seen as pitiful and unworthy but as a full human being. The social model helps me to recognise the barriers, which are the result of social oppression and

exclusion that make life harder for disabled people. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control.

When I reflect on my critical incidents, the social model approach prompted me to realize that I don't expect all students would achieve the same thing, at the same time, in the same way. I understood that the inclusive pedagogy becomes successful only when the flexible learning activity involved choices for students and provided opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and skills between peer members. Disability Studies helped me a lot to analyze my past classroom experience through a disability lens. If I could have done this programme earlier, I could have accommodated my disabled students in a more successful manner. For example, one of my students who cannot sit upright might be excluded from certain activities and games. But now my focus would be on how he or she can be included in the activity, by using mats, floor cushions or lying on the floor or whatever is necessary. I realized that, according to social model thinking, every child has needs, and that the needs of a disabled child are no more extraordinary than any other. The important outcome should be that every child's needs are met within the system. Needs of disabled children are no longer special, they are just different to others, their needs are no bigger or worse. It means they can be dealt with in mainstream settings without special resources, because the resources are there and can be accessed for any child with any need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of my autoethnographic research and the literature review, I make the following recommendations to assist teachers to accommodate disabled children in the mainstream classroom.

1. To provide a positive learning environment in which all children can feel happy, secure and successful.
2. To maintain a calm and strong supportive environment underpinned by a firm, fair and consistent discipline developed through positive behaviour management policy which promotes independence, self-discipline and encourages children to feel good about personal achievements;
3. Train the teachers to develop positive attitudes towards disabled children based on the social model approach, as these attitudes support more successful inclusive programs for students.
4. To provide an environment where children can develop positive friendships and support and be supported by their peers.
5. In-service training or additional workshops arranged by the Department of Education, should address the topic of inclusive pedagogy based on universal design for learning there should be the same for teachers in pre-service programmes so that many teachers can have knowledge on the same topics. It is very essential to familiarize educators with the theoretical and practical aspects of accommodating disabled children during the teaching-learning process.
6. Educators need to employ different assessment approaches in their classrooms to accommodate the needs of different learning styles in their classrooms.
7. To enable each child to develop his or her full potential.
8. To ensure all children have equality of access and opportunity.

9. Teachers can support disabled students in and out of the classroom, like after school hours, through additional learning and grading opportunities, formative assessments. Such support visibly extends the teacher's commitment to all their students' learning.
10. Teachers can create a nurturing classroom where disabled students feel valued because of their differences, and feel comfortable in participating in the class.

CONCLUSION

Any attempt to foster positive attitudes and increase the level of knowledge, leading to fewer concerns about inclusion could lead to successful implementation of inclusive education. There are certain important requirements and ingredients that are necessary for an inclusive classroom. Firstly, there must be the belief that all children can learn. Secondly, there must be the creation of learning environments, which are characterised specifically by care for the learner. Finally, there must be a form of planning that truly caters to the needs of each and every learner in the classroom. Let me conclude in my words it is only *"when differentiation is understood as a process of understanding, valuing and responding to differences in how people learn that it can be a largely positive experience"*.

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