INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE SUB SAHARAN AFRICA: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE.

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The various policy documents that have emerged over time stressed the principles of human rights, social justice, quality education for all, the right to a basic education; equality of opportunity, and re-address of past educational inequalities. This paper gives the background of inclusion and further tries to motivate and suggest how developing countries can move from theory to practice. It looks at inclusive education and its demands, the position of regular schools, a discussion on constraints experienced by developing countries in relation to the demands of inclusion, implications for integration and special schools as well as teacher training.

When the subject of *inclusive education* is introduced one cannot help thinking of its demands and all it calls for, it seems like raising an umbrella against a storm. On one hand, this position or attitude is a cause for concern, and yet on the other end inclusive education is about the transformation of the education system. Education is a conservative enterprise and change of this nature must surely result in wide scale skepticism (Naicker, 2000). Given the financial and human resources constraints, that developing countries experience, the seemingly unclear situation at governments level, ideological socialization, large classes, lack of awareness of what inclusion entails, an unrealistic sense of urgency of some with regards to implementation, are good enough reasons to scare many. At this juncture proponents of inclusive education must realize the enormity of the task at hand. Developing countries cannot afford an overnight change of attitude or position on Inclusive Education. Policy endeavors must evolve grassroots participation so that all stakeholders are well informed and in order for the process to enjoy the support of the majority of teachers, parents, children, the community and those who are generally involved in education.

The inclusion debate has essentially developed along moral and ideological lines, with access to mainstream schools seen as a basic right for all. Tilstone, Florian & Rose (1998) suggest that we live in an ideological climate favouring the inclusion of all handicapped pupils into ordinary schools. Inclusion of pupils with disabilities into regular schools came about as a legislative mandate for special education service (Aefsky, 1995). This is supported by legislation in many countries. One of the most significant events to change the nature of education and special education was the passage and Education of All Handicapped Children's Act gazetted by the United States Congress in 1975. The Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) enabled access to public school classrooms for thousands of children who previously were not eligible for regular school education due to the nature and severity of their disabilities. This law was reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1990 at the Jomtien conference in Thailand, the World community pledged to ensure the right to education for all, regardless of individual differences. In addition to this the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (1994) made the proclamation that all children with special educational needs must have access to regular schools. In Italy the 1971 Education Act enforces the inclusion of all handicapped pupils into regular schools (Buzzi, 1995). In developed countries there is a swift move towards inclusion, for example in the United States of America, the United Kingdom and in Australia (Mittler, 2000; UNESCO, 1993). In developing countries Educational Institutions were still working on improving integration and have now been caught in a wave of change towards inclusion. Most developing countries get their literature and other educational resources from developed countries, mostly England, United States of America, Australia and Canada (UNESCO, 1994). Therefore it would appears as though major developments or transformation that occurs in developed countries has a direct influence on developing countries that

rely heavily on the literature and resources from these developed countries. Winter (2000) points out that due to lack of relevant research and literature, developing countries continue to develop trailing behind developed countries. They cannot afford to develop far behind because most of their personnel are educated and trained in developed countries with the use of the latest technology, current educational innovations and literature. It is therefore imperative that developing countries are likely to continue to embrace new changes before they fully implement existing programs.

Inclusion according to Mittler (2000b) implies a radical reform of the school in terms of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and grouping of pupils. He goes on to point out that inclusion is based on a value system that welcomes and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language of origin, social background, level of educational achievement or disability. Booth (1999a) argues that inclusion cannot be considered in isolation from exclusion, therefore it is a process of increasing participation of learners and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures and communities of neighbourhood mainstream centers of learning. Ainscow (1999) contend that inclusive education should be concerned with overcoming barriers to participate that maybe experienced by any pupils. While the tendency is to think of inclusion as involving the movement of pupils from special to mainstream contexts, with the implication that they are included once they are there, in contrast inclusion is a process that takes time to develop within mainstream schools. Inclusive education is provided in the regular classroom but is not incompatible with the notion of support (Booth, 1999b). The implication is that all teachers are responsible for the education of all children irrespective of individual differences or disability.

Inclusive education and its demands

Inclusion is a vision, a road to be traveled, but a road without ending since it is a process rather than a destination and a road with all kinds of barriers and obstacles, some of them invisible and some of them are in our own heads and hearts (Mittler, 2000a). Inclusion involves diversity, change of mind-set, values for schools and for society, social justice, universal human rights and equal opportunity. Inclusive education allows all students to have access to any school of their choice in their area regardless of their strengths, weaknesses and disability. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other pupils, teachers and support staff.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its 1997 amendments make it clear that schools have to educate children with disabilities in general education classrooms. As spelt out by James Grant, Director of UNICEF (1991), if the 21st century is to be a better one for mankind than the 20th has been, then it is essential that the principle of first call for children becomes part of the new political intellect. The Jomtien conference held in Thailand, organized by UNICEF, UNESCO, the UN Development Programme and the World Bank, had the goal *Education for All by 2000* by providing free education to 200 million children worldwide. According to the figures published by UNESCO (1994), 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa account for almost all children in Africa between six and eleven years. However, the enrolment rates have fallen and the trend seems to continue. The report indicates that this region accounts for one-third of the world's children who are out of school. It is estimated that on current trends, the proportion will rise to three-quarters or 75% by the year 2015. Although the Jomtien documents made explicit references to children with disabilities, very few governments have reported new initiatives to enable children with disabilities to attend regular schools. The Salamanca conference marked a major milestone on the road to inclusion. While there is consensus on the implementation of inclusion it is the writer's view that developing countries have not yet arrived at the point where every school in each and every developing country would have to implement inclusive education. This must be discouraged at all costs, all stakeholders need to be educated, informed and have full knowledge of the journey of inclusive education and how it is to be traveled. This way the project will enjoy support from all players, thus regular class teachers, support staff, parents, children and the community at large.

In developed countries Italy passed legislation in 1971 that led to the closure of most special schools thereby transferring all children with special educational needs to regular schools with support. Spain invited schools to volunteer and in return enjoy a 25% reduction in class size and the guaranteed services of a support team. Hegarty (1987) asserts that in England the 1981 Education Act encouraged more inclusion of children with disabilities in ordinary schools. Canada encouraged the policy of inclusion as early as 1983 (UN, 1993). In Australia inclusion was encouraged from as early as 1965 (Center & Ward, 1987). Germany, the Netherlands and France established isolated inclusive practice while retaining special schools and systems at national level (UNESCO, 1996). Apart from the above-

mentioned countries, inclusive education is receiving strong government backing in China (UNESCO, 1996).

In developing countries Uganda has shown commitment to universal primary education and in particular inclusive education. Despite civil wars and the AIDS pandemic, Uganda has opened its education system to a number of under privileged children. Four in every family have access to free primary education and any child who has a disability or is a girl has first priority. The number of children attending school has increased within a short time (Kristensen and Kristensen, 1997). Policy and practice throughout the world is moving towards inclusion (Daniels & Gartner, 1999) but this process seems to be happening with more commitment and more enthusiasm in some of the poorest countries of the world. Poverty is not the sole explanation for not implementing, inclusion; it is a matter of political will and priorities. Some poor countries invest in education (UN, 1993); these include Cuba, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia, Guyana, parts of India and Zimbabwe. A good example is Lesotho one of the poorest countries in the sub-Saharan Africa. Despite major economic problems, the government of Lesotho sees education as a priority. It launched a pilot programme in 1993 in which ten rural primary schools included all local children with disabilities in the regular classroom (Khatleli, 1995). About 300 children with disabilities took part in the pilot programme, out of an enrolment of over 9000 pupils. In support of this programme nearly all the teachers in the selected schools were given an intensive three-weeks training. When the programme was evaluated, it was noted that there was full commitment and a feeling of confidence and empowerment in the teachers concerned (Mittler & Platt, 1995). The interaction was total, both socially and educationally. Despite the class sizes of 50 to 100 pupils, a wide range of teaching strategies was noted, small group work, one to one teaching and peer tuition. The report also indicates that teachers never lost track of including all children all the time and so were naturally inclusive.

The actual demands of inclusive education are nothing new. Teachers already have much of the knowledge and skills they need to teach inclusively (Mittler, 2000b), what they lack are confidence in their own competence. The provision of support systems both within schools and from outside, are key to progress. Teachers need to be professionally developed and prepared for the situation psychologically, socially and attitude wise in order for them to support inclusion all the way. With time, workshops, seminars and exposure, teachers will build on their experiences and skills in reaching all children. It is the writer's conviction that developing countries have not yet reached a stage where all regular schools can practice inclusion. Therefore selected schools throughout the regions or villages could be properly resourced to include all children. Schools in rural areas and remote places where infrastructure is less developed, work under difficult conditions with a shortage of resources and lack of support. Groundwork has to be done in schools and communities in order to cultivate positive attitudes towards inclusion. Where attitudes are positive, inclusion is likely to succeed. A study by Croll and Moses (1985 and 2000) in Mittler (2000b), where they interviewed 48 head teachers and 300 class teachers in 60 primary schools, indicate that nine out of ten teachers thought the regular class was the right place for children with special educational needs. Teacher perception and attitudes are fundamental to their (teachers) response to new policies on inclusion and will affect how they react to and implement the programme. Staff development programmes should be intensified in all schools to equip teachers with the necessary skills to teach in an inclusive environment.

Regular schools

If inclusion is going to work, all teachers in regular schools should be prepared to teach allchildren irrespective of the children's individual differences. The programme should be supported by education authorities, school boards, head teachers, parents, children and all members of the external support staff. Some schools will quickly adjust to accommodate the inclusion programme, others will need more time to adapt and put more facilities in the schools. Each school will encounter different obstacles along the way, but all schools will find that the most difficult barriers spring from deeply ingrained but not necessarily expressed doubts about whether inclusion will work or not. Governments and schools should work towards the implementation and enforcement of the philosophy, values and principles of inclusion as set out by UNESCO (1994). These are some of the major challenges that developing countries face in implementing inclusive education:

1. Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human right.
2. Human differences are normal.
3. Learning differences must be adapted to the needs of the child.
4. Ordinary schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students.

5. Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.
6. While regular schools provide an effective education to the majority of children, they also improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system.
7. Governments should adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.

The foundation of inclusion must be classrooms and teachers that already provide support naturally as part of daily practice. In this case schools should ensure that all pupils are fully involved in lessons and have opportunities to interact meaningfully with the teacher and with one another and that they benefit. In order for the programs to be effective, there is need for support personnel to help teachers. Support should not devalue or deskill the existing quality practice. It can be offered in the natural environment of the ordinary classroom and using the teacher's experiences and natural repertoire of skills in ensuring that all pupils participate and are included. Regular schools should ensure that extra-curricular activities encourage the participation of all children and draw on their knowledge and experience within and outside the school. Learning programmes are to be responsive and accessible to all children catering for their individual differences. The learning environment should allow children to be actively involved in their learning and also enjoy cooperative learning. Discipline is to be based on individual understanding and respect. Teachers are to prepare a variety of activities to minimize barriers to learning and participation for every student. It would be important for teachers to adopt partnership in teaching to support the learning and participation of all children. School resources are to be made known and distributed fairly throughout the school to support inclusion. Staff expertise is to be fully utilized so that child difference is fully supported in learning and participation. Curriculum materials should be adapted to suit and reflect the background and experience of all learners. All learning and other school activities should be accessible to all children. Teachers and other members of staff need to be aware of the physical effort required to complete tasks by some learners with impairments or chronic illness. Some children with impairments will require additional time to use equipment in practical work. Members of staff should be able to provide alternative ways of giving experience or understanding for children who cannot engage in particular activities for example using science equipment during experiments, some exercises in physical education or exercises that may require observation and recording where blind children may be involved. Planning and preparation of lessons should include a variety of activities to cater for all children irrespective of their limitations, abilities and disabilities. Assessment procedures should suite individual children taking into consideration their limitations and how best they can be assessed. Therefore schools cannot afford to have one standard way of assessing children's performance since this will disadvantage children with special educational needs. A variety of assessment procedures will have to be put in place in order to realistically measure different children's performances.

It must be pointed out that this is not going to achieve easily since there are difficulties and challenges to be overcome on the way. Availability of resources is one area of concern. A research team could be put in place to find out the needs of schools and then make recommendations for learning materials to be made. More time would be needed by both teachers and children in order for them to cover all the skills in the curriculum. This could be achieved through a combination of individual, group, class, theme and project teaching. Teachers and support staff could be given more training to develop and enhance their skills in teaching children with special needs. This could be achieved through seminars, workshops and short courses. While it would appear to be more expensive due to increased teaching materials and personnel involved, special schools have not been cheap either (Farrell, 1999). The cost of education and training through inclusion should be weighed against the cost of supporting these individuals through out their life span. It would be important to in place monitoring strategies and have a multi-disciplinary assessment team that comprises of specialist teachers, psychologists, speech and language specialists, physio and occupational therapists, counselors and other relevant professionals to monitor, evaluate and review the program.

Teachers supporting each other

Teachers can support one another whenever they have an opportunity to discuss problems and barriers of inclusive learning. A visiting specialist teacher could hold meetings with regular class teachers and discuss problems they face and she can facilitate the exchange of information and ideas. While the presence of a second adult in a classroom might be a new experience for most teachers in the

mainstream classrooms and may not be prepared for it, partnership in teaching can strengthen and further the cause for inclusion. Classroom and support teachers should plan, review lessons and share ideas in working with individual children, groups and the whole class. More support teachers can be trained and work together with mainstream teachers switching roles such that when one is working with a group the other is working with individuals. Studies by Farrell (1999) confirm that support-staff play a key role in acting as the main source of support for children with exceptional needs in mainstream schools. Other members of the support team can spend the whole of their time helping one or more children in the mainstream setting. Although teachers were responsible for planning schemes of work that were then implemented by support teachers, in many cases support teachers took the lead in adapting programmes of work and in planning new programmes (Farrell, 1999). While the use of trained para-professional staff plays a vital role, the moral and ethical implications associated with their involvement are disturbing. It is a dilemma that many developing and developed countries have learnt to live with. Teachers and support staff should work as a team and share practical ideas on how they can deal with children who are more challenging and demanding.

Children supporting one another

Successful inclusion and participation in lessons and in the life of the school depends to a large extent on other children. In general, help and support are given casually and without teacher planning or intervention. In developing countries where schools experience large classes, children are grouped in mixed ability groups so that the more able children help the less able ones. The other form is that of peer tutoring that has been found to be effective and natural through the play-way method (Winter, 2000). Research reviews on inclusion of children with severe learning difficulties report that other children in the schools are generally supportive and accepting (Farrell, 1997 and Sebba & Sachdev, 1997). Another study by Lewis (1995) of groups of children working together in one school provides more insight into the process of inclusion from the perspective of the children involved than any number of scholarly reviews. In general research studies indicate positive results on mainstream children supporting other children with special educational needs. This process can further be encouraged and implemented in developing countries.

Implications for special schools and integration

The process of working towards a more inclusive society has to start long before children first go to school. Its foundations lie in a society in which parents can feel supported, both economically and socially, in bringing up a family in a society in which children are valued and cherished and given an opportunity to flourish. In some of the developing countries (UNESCO, 1993) most children with disabilities are now identified early and many are in mainstream provision of one kind or another, such as playgroups, day nurseries, nursery schools and pre-schools attached to mainstreams. Special schools can join hands with mainstream schools and slowly reduce their numbers off loading into mainstream schools. With careful planning special schools could avoid enrolling children who can benefit from the mainstream and only enroll extreme cases like bedridden children who require medical treatment regularly and those who frequently rely on medicine to calm them down. It would not be a sensible venture to include all children without taking into consideration whether the child benefits or not.

Integration programs could be adapted to inclusion. Integration involves preparing pupils for placement in ordinary schools. Pupils go through educational and social readiness before they are transferred to ordinary schools (Blamires, 1999). Appropriate equipment for pupils with special educational needs and specialist support is available in the mainstream school. Specialist teachers service individual children or groups of children in units in particular subjects. Integrated children could remain in the mainstreams with reduced support but with total involvement in the life of a regular school. It would be a good starting point for inclusion. Schools already running integration programmes could be the first to introduce inclusive education on full scale because the resources and personnel are already in the schools.

Initial teacher education is to ensure that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive teaching. Teachers need to be made aware that inclusive schools are the most long-term beneficial investment that can be made for children with disabilities. All teacher-training courses could make the inclusion of special needs element a condition for the approval of training courses. This aspect could be embedded in all educational courses. Training programs could be extended from three years to four years in order to cover the aspect of inclusive education. Special needs training should cover children from pre-school so that qualified teachers can teach pre-school children in mainstream whether it is a day care center or nursery school. This would help to include children from an early age

and it would just become a natural system. Although some colleges have implemented this, the programmes do not adequately prepare students. A study by Vlachou (1997) indicates that newly qualified teachers who had received some elements of special needs during their teacher training expressed that they were not well prepared to teach children with special needs. It is also possible that they may not have been prepared socially and psychologically. However, the goal is to prepare every teacher to teach all children. Success for a few was an option in the past and success for all is the challenge now (Blunkett, 2000).

Conclusion

The road to inclusion is not an easy one; it involves change of attitudes, change of values, change of teacher training programmes and change of school systems. While change is one of the few permanent aspects in life, not many people are comfortable with it for fear of losing control of the known. As pointed out before, there is need for change of mindset such that the society at large and the school in particular cultivate norms that include pupils with special needs both in society and at school. Communities need to plan buildings, accommodation, roads and sporting facilities accommodating the needs of people with special needs. Schools need to adapt their facilities in order to easy the movement and operational activities for children with special needs. This calls for change of attitudes and a shift in values. If developing countries are to implement inclusive education meaningfully, schools need to re-think their value systems, restructure their organizations and curriculum and assessment procedures in order to overcome barriers to learning and participation and cater for the full range of children in their schools and in their countries. The degree to which education authorities, head teachers and mainstream teachers understand and are committed towards inclusion is reflected in the quality of the support they give and the amount of time they commit to the programme. While developing countries have financial constraints, the main issue is not about poverty, it is about attitudes, values and beliefs and political will. A number of poor countries that have implemented inclusion have been cited and their programmes are on the road to success. It is about time that developing countries use the little available resources they have and do what is practical and feasible in their situation. There is need to map out strategies in order to develop sound policies and clear objectives that support the implementation of inclusion.

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