

Institutional model Practices on Inclusive Education: A Case study of Montfort School, Guwahati.

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Abstract

The concept of inclusive education and its practice is emerging, and more educational institutions are transforming to this new education model. Inclusive education means education for all students irrespective of their perceived difference, disability, or other social, emotional, cultural, or linguistic difference. This case study is developed based on the primary data collected from the principal, teachers, special educators, and alumni. It provides an overview of various practices, facilities, and strategies used by Montfort School Guwahati to implement an inclusive education system. The study shows the infrastructure facilities, curriculum, evaluation system, and strategies followed by the school to run a successful inclusive education system. The study also highlights the transformation of the specially-abled students and their holistic development. The present study will be useful for the schools planning to start inclusive education. It will also be helpful to teachers, special educators, students, parents, and architects to understand the functioning and requirements of inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Case study, Special education

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of inclusive education and its practice has been moving at a progressive rate at the national and international levels. Inclusive education is a means of education provided by the school for all children irrespective of any perceived difference, disability, or other social, emotional, cultural, or linguistic difference (Florian, 2008). Booth et al. (2000) explained inclusive education as “a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community, and curricula of mainstream schools”. Inclusive education is a means of education in which the learner is schooled in the least restrictive environment possible to overcome his or her challenges in learning and development. Inclusive education for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), as an approach, tries to address the special needs of all children with disabilities. It paves the way for children with disabilities to learn together with non-disabled children through access to common schools and community educational settings with an appropriate network of support services (Pati, 2011).

Inclusive education gives access to quality education for all (UNICEF). Further, it reveals that changes occur in children with disability as a result of being placed in an environment which provides valuable and necessary resources to meet the student’s learning needs. Inclusive education equally offers the opportunity for improved social development

and academic outcomes for all learners. It leads to the development of social skills and better social interactions because learners are exposed to the actual environment in which they have to interact with other learners with unique characteristics, interests, and abilities (Kappen, 2010). There are different benefits for inclusive education compared to special education setting. According to Singh (2016), contrary to special education setting, the benefits of inclusive education is marked with performance in terms of friendship, social interaction, academic benefits, and better adjustment of children with disability. The present study brings out the various practices of inclusive education implemented at Montfort school, Guwahati, Assam.

Methods

The present case study was conducted at Montfort school, Guwahati, Assam to understand the infrastructure facilities, curriculum, evaluation system and strategies followed by the school to run a successful inclusive education system. The data is collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected by conducting personal interview with the principal, teachers, special educators, and alumnus of the school. The secondary data is collected from the reports, documents, and website of the school.

History of Montfort

Montfort School, Guwahati was established in the year 1996 with the mission of empowering children to become the leaders of tomorrow, with clarity of thought, high ethical values and love for God and humanity. The Montfort Brothers started an inclusive education program at Guwahati based on the request of the Catholic Archdiocese of Guwahati. It is owned by the Institution of the brothers of St. Gabriel Society, N E Province. The school is situated in a beautiful location at 10th Mile, G S Road, Guwahati, Assam. The Montfortian organization caters to the various educational needs of children and youth. Apart from the regular school system, it imparts technical education, education for the hearing and speech impaired, visually impaired, physically and mentally challenged. Aiming at the welfare of the marginalized, the organization is also involved in village and slum development programs.

Montfort aims at bringing out responsible, secular, and spiritual persons committed to the welfare of every human being. The school moulds the students to be dedicated as well to promote justice, peace and love in the society. This edifies Montfort co-educational school for inclusive education. Montfort is affiliated to CBSE New Delhi and was upgraded to the senior secondary level in 2011. This inclusive education set up provides educational facilities for both disabled and non-disabled children. The humble beginning of this institution which started with 10 disabled children in the year 2007 has now turned to be 117 (children with disabilities) among the total 1945 students. The school has children with hearing and speech impairment, visual impairment, autism, intellectual disability and cerebral palsy. There are 2-3 disabled children in each class.

The school has a well-defined infrastructure. They conduct accessibility auditing as per the need of time to evaluate building and infrastructure, which help them to identify the barriers and good features in its design and functionality. This auditing ensure that the school creates a barrier free environment for children with disability. It has a well-equipped computer lab and a library with over 5000 titles. The school has a well-designed football and

basketball court. They have 200 mts track for the students to run/ walk. In order to make the building accessible to all, it is furnished with ramp and handrail facility. The building is designed with appropriate colour contrast because visually impaired students with minimum eyesight can distinguish different colours. It enhances the movement of the students easier, and provide a safer environment for them to walk independently. The building with tactile tiles provides adequate grip in the movements of children with visual impairment and autism. There are ample number of accessible toilets for boys and girls in the campus. The school provides equal opportunities for the disabled and non-disabled children in all the activities of the school. Regarding the cultural activities of the school, the level of participation by disabled students are high and they are able to perform well as the school has an accessible auditorium. As a whole, the school facilitates a barrier-free environment in the campus.

Academic Supportive Devices

Materials Adaptations

Materials adaptation in inclusive education means the use of some strategies to make the textbook more effective and flexible. The school has all the facilities needed for disabled students. For visually impaired students, braille, large print, tactile symbols and accessible braille question papers are used. It enhances the academic performance and communication of the students. Montfort adopts various practices depending on the level of acclimatization needed for children.

Technical devices and equipments

The school has different special devices for children with visual, hearing, and speech impairment, autism, and cerebral palsy. These devices provide added independence and flexibility to students in their activities.

Talking computers

In order to give directions to students with visual impairment, talking computers are used in the school. It speaks the words that appear on the screen of a standard print terminal.

Computer software

The school use CDAC, a computer software which helps to plan out lesson plans for children with intellectual disability and autism.

Digital Canes

The students use Digital canes and talking canes with sensors that give directions to children with visual impairment.

Smart classroom

The school provides a Smart classroom facility to all the students.

Assistive Devices

In order to reduce the complications due to disability, assistive devices like walker, wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc. are made available for all the needy students.

Other Services

There is also an equipped physiotherapy unit inside the school. The facility is available to needy students, and the school has allotted specific time in the timetable to avail this facility for them.

Curriculum and Pedagogy for all students

There is a uniform curriculum and syllabus for all the students in the school. They use an inclusive pedagogy approach to teach the students. According to Florian, (2014), inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that supports teachers to respond to individual differences between learners but it avoids the marginalisation that can occur when some students are treated differently.

The classroom set up gives more emphasis on the readiness for the future of disabled children. The students who have difficulty in language and problem with motor function, will not be pressured like other students. The subjects are common for all the students till VIII standard, but there is a provision to choose optional subjects in class IX and X instead of subjects like Mathematics and Physics. Other than this, all the students follow the same syllabus.

The teachers and special educators revealed that occasionally it is challenging to identify the needs of children. A teacher who was working for seven years with the school says that “Some children try to catch the attention of the other students. Therefore, it is not feasible to follow a special pedagogy for them. In this background, peer support is the only strategy applied”. The non-disabled students keep them busy by involving with them in classroom activities. Florian and Hawkins (2011) explained teachers' challenges and dilemmas while implementing inclusive pedagogy.

Methods adopted for Teaching Mathematics and Physics

With regard to the students with disabilities, mathematics and physics are mandatory till class VIII. These subjects are taught by special teachers. Peer support is one of the highlights in this school. It is noteworthy that 90% of the non-disabled students are skilled in sign language and willing to support their companions. While teacher explains the subject in the class, the co-students help students with hearing and speech impairment for practicing it. The audio-visual facility also helps the students to understand and take notes in the class. If special needs students are unable to grasp the subjects, other students help them to understand the portion taught and help them to complete the notes during off periods, Physical Training (PT) classes or substitute periods. Teachers also spend time to help the students with learning difficulty after 2.30pm (after the regular class hours).

Students with visual impairment get facilities like special boards/ slates (Braille slates) which help them to read and write. With the support of the special board, they are able to do the calculations. They use separate books which make things simple and help them to understand the concept well. These students are not encouraged to write the notes like the other students (with detailed explanation) instead, they are trained to write the same thing in a precise manner.

Evaluation Criteria

Students with disabilities attempts to study everything same as the other students do. There is no disparity between the disabled and non-disabled children in the school. The students with disability also give the exam like any other student in the school. They adhere to the same syllabus, but the pattern of the question paper and the way of writing the examination will be slightly different. The question papers will be simplified for the students with disability and there will be a slight difference in their pattern of writing. The non-disabled students write fully detailed answers, while the disabled write with a different pattern of answering.

The school follows grade-based system on academic performance, which comprises projects, assignments and maintenance of study materials. The school follows behavior modification policy, thereby every student is given a diary which contains 30 types of good behaviours (which provide personal points addition) and misbehaviors (which provide personal point deletion). Periodic evaluation is done based on the above and it is discussed with parents too. This is mainly to improve the behaviour of students, and it is not used for any grading purpose. This evaluation help teachers and parents to know about the behaviour of the student. This method is found to be an effective way of improving the behaviour of the students.

Promotion to the higher grade

The students are promoted to higher classes on the basis of their result. Every year a minimum of 3-4 students with disability get promoted for higher education after class XII. The students who are not eligible to get promoted to higher secondary level, will be sent for alternative learning such as vocational training, skill training and other programmes with the consent of their parents.

Strategies

The school has made it a norm that every pupil and staff should know sign language in order to make effective communication with students with hearing and speech impairment, so as to promote social inclusion. Non-Disabled students are trained in sign language which paves the way for maintaining a very strong peer support in the school. Students are willing to help the disabled students, by promoting inclusion in the society, starting at the school itself. There is no discrimination found in the school on the ground of disability. "Sense of oneness" is the strength of the school.

The school doesn't encourage sympathetic attitudes towards students with disability. They promote inclusion by considering them as one among the other students. (E.g., Sharing meals in the canteen outing, sports etc.) The school does not encourage donors to provide cash or kind on the ground of sympathy towards children with disability.

In the classroom, parents (mostly mothers) of disabled children are also involved with the teachers for managing their children. Parents help the teachers in the classroom especially in dealing children with some behavioral issues. This involvement helps the parents to get an understanding of their children's capabilities and limitations.

Parents' Meeting

Parents are one of the supporting pillars for the teachers and the school. The school acknowledges the support and cooperation from the parents. The teachers receive 90% positive responses from parents, but the cooperation and participation are less from the parents who belong to lower socio-economic backgrounds. This is because of their low level of understanding on disability and to the need and importance of education for the children with special needs. The school conducts parents' meetings once in three months in the school, which include:

- Class wise parent teacher meeting
- Regular contact with parents as per the need

Documentation

The school maintains proper documents of school related activities and performance of the students. The details of the documents are given below:

- Daily Log book to get to know the daily events of the school
- Record of the improvement/ activities by house wise team
- Individual Education Plan for LKG, up to class I
- Record of Physiotherapy which include plans and progress of the child
- Individual Child Plan Records
- Progress report, Diary
- Disability certificate

Opportunity for participating in other events

Montfort has good network work and collaboration with the Governmental and the Non-Governmental agencies. They collaborate with international agencies like CBM, Light for the World and Liliane Fonts etc. These agencies support the inclusive education programmes in terms of training and support for students in higher studies and vocational training.

Montfort as an institution promotes inclusion of persons with disability, gives adequate importance and opportunity for students to participate in the events within the campus, across the state and outside the state. The school provides special coaching in arts and sports for all the students and is a part of their time table. The school does not exclusively conduct special programs for the disabled but organizes arts and sports coaching for the students.

Staff

Staffing plays a vital role in the implementation of a programme. The inclusive education programme of the school consists of efficient and committed teachers. The level of cooperation and understanding among the teachers is high and they support each other irrespective of the seniority of the teachers. Of the total 69 teachers, 13 are special educators in visual impairment, hearing and speech impairment, autism and intellectual disability. Apart from this, 4 are with foundation courses in disability and special Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Post Graduate Programme in Disability (PGPD).

One of the dilemmas teachers and other staff in special school face is about how to respond when learners experience difficulty (Norwich, 2007). In order to overcome this the school provides periodic training programmes (3 - 4 training) to the staff members to update the knowledge and equip them in their field of activity. They focus on training in sign language (for all teachers), class room management for inclusive education and related programmes. The training is not only for the staff but the school ensures student's development through periodic seminars, career guidance and counseling especially for class IX to class XII.

Experience of a teacher

“Before I came to this school, I had no idea about inclusion of students with disabilities. I have been here for the last 6 years. Whatever I have seen, and heard was the only concept about special schools. I never knew that students in an inclusive set up can learn and study like any other student. These children are same like others. There are many talented students in our school. Chara is one among them. She is a child with Autism, studying in Class X. She is a very good singer. I am so moved by her. The way she welcomes teachers in the class motivates me. I take pride in her involvement at school. It is really amazing to note that the students with hearing and speech impairment outshines in dance performance in the school and other public forums. I am taken up by Kalam, a Class VI student, with visual impairment who participated in the T.V. programme ‘Little champs.’ When we see them, I understood that they have a lot more talents than us. We should not treat them different because they are one among us and now, I am glad to be one with them”.

Achievements

Studies show that despite the many challenges, persons with disabilities are turning to self-employment and succeeding in their own business. Montfort as an institution promotes welfare of children with visual and hearing impairment. A good number of students with disabilities who completed their studies in Montfort, have successfully overcome their physical and mental challenges and are involved in various jobs. The first batch (2007) comprised of 5 students having visual impairment now are employed in various sectors such as bank, schools and private sector companies. Most of them are working in Delhi. Mr. Robin, one of the passed-out students with visual impairment from Montfort shared the initial challenges he came across in his attempt to get a job. After continuous search he got his job and presently, he is happily working in the Bank of Baroda, New Delhi. He conveyed that the passed-out students make a good network with the disabled students in Montfort, thereby everyone gets an opportunity to find out job for them - *Transforming disability into ability*. These persons with disabilities have proved that there are people who do not allow their disabling conditions to become a roadblock in their lives. An inclusive educational practice of this kind builds up self-confidence as their biggest strength and their courage readies them for success. They are good in academic performance as well as extracurricular activities. Some of the successful performance by the students in the words of a teacher is mentioned below.

“Aman Chetry of class LKG diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy stands topper in the class”.

“We have to meet Chara, a class X girl, with autism spectrum disorder. She is very good in academics and in extracurricular activities. She has proved her talents as a good musician, keyboard player etc. by her level of participation within and outside the school in all the activities”.

“RideepPhukan and Rubina Devi (Class XII) are students with visual impairment. Their level of participation within and outside family is very good. These students excel in their academic performance”.

Conclusion

This article has brought out the understanding and practices of inclusive education, at Montfort School. It deals with the infrastructure and facilities, material adaptations, technical devices, equipment, curriculum, staffing, evaluation, strategies and achievements. The study shows that the infrastructure, facilities and friendly environment provided in the school paves the way for a conducive atmosphere in the practice of inclusive education. The school create a learning environment which suits different types of students under the same umbrella. The personalized approach of teachers, parents' involvement and student support helps to create a learning environment for all the students. The school ensures all the students and teachers are proficient in sign language and focuses on transforming disability to ability by using various practices based on the level of acclimatization needed for children.

A disabled friendly infrastructure is one of the essential components for promoting inclusion of children with disability. In this regard, the school provide a conducive environment for all the students. One advantage of inclusive education and the environment is that it helps other students to be more empathetic and supportive to the fellow students who are specially abled. The school ensure that all the students are dedicated in their action and act as a model for promoting justice, peace and love in the society.

In order to actualize an inclusive education programme, experienced and trained staff is important. The present case highlighted the importance of teachers' training in improving motivation and satisfaction in their job. Previous research shows that training helps to improve teacher's characteristics (Norwich, 1994), competency, attitudes and self-efficacy (Buell et al., 1999; Pit-ten Cateet al., 2018). It is also found that teachers who are undergoing training have more positive attitude towards inclusive education (Baker-Ericzen et al., 2009). According to Florian (1998) teachers who are working with inclusive education system needs knowledge about learning difficulties and should be skilled for using specific instructional methods. In Montfort there are adequately trained teachers in the school, which is one of the reasons for the academic achievements on the part of students. The good network and collaboration with other government and non-governmental agencies provide more opportunities for them to innovate in the field of inclusive education.

The content of the study has included the experiences of teachers who rendered their noble services in inclusive education whereas the perspectives of parents are not brought out in this study and this would have brought more understanding about the performance of students. The facilities and support provided by Montfort school now is limited to the children with a few disabilities. Researchers can further include the facilities needed for children with all categories of special needs. Even the inclusive education practices may vary in different international organizations and there is a scope for future studies in an international scenario.

This case study will be useful for the schools planning to start inclusive education. It will also be helpful to teachers, special educators, students, parents, and architects to understand the functioning and requirements of inclusive education.

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