

Re-examining Issue of Inclusion in Education

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Children with disability were included as early as 1968 in the National Policy on Education, but the rhetoric of integrated education has been ambivalently used to keep at bay the broader concept of inclusion. Apart from putting in context the meaning of inclusion in education of children with disability and suggesting some inclusive practices, this article examines the two Acts in the Indian context that have a bearing on education of children with disability, the Persons with Disabilities Act and the Right to Education Act.

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1 Introduction

In the context of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, recently passed in Parliament, the right to education of children with disability needs to be assessed. Although the Comprehensive Action Plan on Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disability (IECYD) proposed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in March 2005, promised inclusive education, it failed to translate itself into the Act. We are thus only left with the possibility of trying to build in inclusion in the context of the current Act. This is an attempt to construct a framework to work this out.

It is pertinent, however, that some clarity is obtained on the matter of inclusion; within the Indian context, it is a much abused term and is often rejected too easily without much research. What makes such populist opinions even worse is the confusion that prevails in the understanding and usage of this and related terms, the semantic proximity of the operative terms “integration” and “inclusion” clouding the issue even further. In addition, as I will discuss later, the national policies and Acts have consistently used the word “integration” even during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, thus making it lie outside the broader concept of inclusion.

Apart from putting in context the meaning of inclusion in education of children with disability and suggesting some inclusive practices in Section 4, I examine here the two Acts in the Indian context that have a bearing on education of children with disability, the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and the Right to Education (RTE) Acts, in Sections 3 and 5 respectively, drawing up in Section 5.1 a framework to make the RTE work for inclusion. However, inclusion is problematised in the context of deaf education in Section 6. I conclude by listing a three-pronged strategy for action and theory in Section 7.

2 Education of Children with Disability

Early on, the matter is marked by a segregationist approach to education of children with disability; special or specialised schools were established in the early part of, and continued throughout, the 19th century. In the early part of the 20th century, eugenicist ideas helped perpetuate such exclusionary principles as the accepted norm. In 1921, under eugenicist influence five categories of disability were identified and children thus labelled were sent to special schools or certified classes. In the United States (US), by the middle of the century, however, the rise of strong parent advocacy groups brought about policy and legislative changes. However, in England and Scotland, even in the 1970s, although the so-called “ineducable” children secured right to education, 400 new special schools opened up to accommodate them. It is commonly believed that educational reform acts put increased pressure on schools to segregate children with disability. In countries with poorer economies, the situation is further aggravated by pressures of overcrowding and lack of facilities in general.

The Social Model of Disability, given the political shape it has come to acquire in the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation’s (UPIAS) 1976 account based on Paul Hunt’s celebratory essay (Hunt 1966), marked a paradigm shift in thinking about disability, and with it, a change of perspective on education of children with disability. The assumptions of much of the legislation initiated during and since that period, for example, shifted emphasis from a treatment of a particular impairment (implied in the Medical Model) to a recognition of development of services for PWD.

2.1 Genesis of the Concept

In India, the right of children with disability to education was envisaged as early as 1968, based on the Kothari Commission recommendations (1964-66) (Education and National Development, 1966). The National Policy on Education (NPE) document says in its Article (4),

Equalisation of Educational Opportunity:
Strenuous efforts should be made to equalise educational opportunity –
(e) educational facilities for the physically

and mentally handicapped children should be expanded and attempt should be made to develop integrated programmes enabling the handicapped children to study in regular schools.

The NPE was revisited in 1986 which includes under the heading “The Handicapped” in its Article 4.9 the following:

The objective should be to integrate the physically and mentally handicapped with the general community as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth and to enable them to face life with courage and confidence. The following measures will be taken in this regard –

- (i) Wherever it is feasible, the education of children with motor handicaps and other mild handicaps will be common with that of others.
- (ii) Special schools with hostels will be provided, as far as possible at district headquarters, for the severely handicapped children.

It is clear from Article 4(e) of the 1968 NPE and Article 4.9(i), (ii) of the 1986 NPE that national policies are centred around the concept of “integration” and “special” schools (see Section 4 on the semantic import of the terms “integration” and “special schools”). Although, it is also clear from the extracts above that the word integration is being used in the sense of inclusion, judging by the revisions that were performed on these policies in terms of review committees and reports of advisory boards, to be discussed directly below, there were no obvious instruments to ensure the broader concept of inclusion within the contexts of these policies.

In 1986, the NPE was further modified and published as “NPE 1986, as modified in 1992”. However, Section 4.9, as above, remained unaltered in this document. The Programme of Action (POA) of 1992 pays the usual lip-service to the broader notion of inclusion – though still using the term integration. It is littered with suggestions about special schools, so much so that it devotes the largest section to “Education in Special Schools”. The POA also moots the concept of *Composite Special Schools*, where “children with different handicaps will be educated in different departments/groups/classrooms”, clearly, a move to segregate all children with disability in one easily identifiable basket. If anything, this instrument for implementation of the NPE was thus in no mood to bring the term integration within the ambit of the broader sense of inclusion.

Prior to this, however, since the 1986 NPE states the possibility of a review of the implementation of various parameters of the policy every five years, in May 1990 the central government appointed a committee to review it (termed as NPERC, 1991). Under the chairmanship of Acharya Ramamurti, this committee found the NPE inadequate on account of a lack of willingness to change the total general education system for the education of children with disability. It also faults the NPE (and by implication, the POA) for treating special schools in isolation. We can thus see how the NPERC is more in tune with moving towards the broader concept of inclusion.

However, at least in terms of broadening the ambit of definition to correctly imply the broader notion of inclusion and also to use the term “inclusion”, the Comprehensive Action Plan on IECYD proposed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in March, 2005 must be considered an exceptional document. It was, however, considered to be highly problematic as it sanctions home-based learning for persons with disabilities and it assigns enhanced work for special schools to become resource centres for training personnel. Although it makes the pledge to in fact move from integration to inclusion by replacing its much earlier precursor known as Integrated Education for Disabled Children [sic]¹ (IEDC), started by the Ministry of Social Welfare in 1974-75 which claims to have integrated over 1.24 lakh children with disability in more than 20,000 mainstream schools, it falls short on the above counts. Even the National Curriculum Framework 2005 produced by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), in its policy of inclusion makes only a cursory (and thoughtless) remark that children with disability may need assistance or more time.

3 The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995

With this development in the background, as late as 1995, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 was passed with the philosophy of viewing disability as a medical condition; for example, the whole of Chapter IV is devoted to “prevention” and “early detection” of disability.

With the medical model reinstated within the Indian context, special schools cannot be far behind. Chapter V of the Act on education directly admits this in its Article 26:

the appropriate Government and local authorities shall –

- (c) promote setting of special schools in Government and private sector for those in need of special education in such a manner that children with disabilities living in any part of the country have access to such schools.

This Act therefore directly encourages authorities to set up special schools. That the Act does not distinguish between special schools and special education is also clear from the usage of the latter phrase in Article 49 of Chapter IX (Research and Manpower Development) where provisions are made for financially assisting research on “special education” undertaken by universities, institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As per the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, inclusion is distinctly a criterion for special education, thus clearly delineating from special, segregated or separate schools, the PWD Act is unaware of the distinction.

Similarly, unaware is the Act on the distinction alluded to in the opening paragraphs of this article and in Section 2.1 between inclusion and integration, settling in fact – and quite certainly, without taking into account the difference that exists – for the latter in Article 26:

the appropriate Government and local authorities shall –

- (b) endeavour to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal schools.

Without a clarification on this issue, the Act can be deemed to directly negate the convictions of the social model, the only framework that sufficiently demonstrates

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that a mere understanding of inaccessible environments do not lead to political reform without promoting social inclusion.

Further evidence that the Act is really pushing for setting up of special schools and integration can be gleaned from Article 29 of the same chapter:

Appropriate Governments to set up teachers' training institutions to develop trained manpower for schools for children with disabilities –

... so that requisite trained manpower is available for special schools and integrated schools for children with disabilities.

In short, this Act thus clearly underlines the need for special schools and integration, the absence of the term “inclusion” is quite striking in the context of the history of the use of the terms in different policy documents (see Section 2.1).

4 Integration versus Inclusion

The distinction is no better teased out than in Oliver (1996), who argued, *inter alia*, that inclusion is not a static state like integration but is a dynamic process that implies changes in school ethos to create a community that accepts and values difference. For inclusion to work, curriculum content, rather than merely curriculum delivery, must change where the child's right to belong to a mainstream school does not remain a matter of legal right but becomes their moral and political right.

The confusion that pervades ideas and opinions in this field has much to do with, as I indicated earlier, the semantic proximity of the two terms. To make matters somewhat worse, there are several variants of integration (geographical, social and functional); though all forms of integration is a matter of location, they all also have the common assumption of assimilation (of the child with disability into the mainstream school). However, the result of this is the emergence of the philosophy of integration, that is, of the child fitting in, whereas the school remaining largely unchanged.

Though functional integration (children with and without disability being taught in the same class) is a necessary condition, without adopting a social model, by itself, it cannot bring about inclusion. The use of the term “integration” in the PWD Act 1995 clearly does not signify functional integration (which is a

prerequisite for inclusion) but rather either geographical or social integration. In most cases, this trickles down in practice to resource rooms or separate classes.

Crucial to inclusion is also the involvement of PWD in planning and execution of inclusive programmes in schools. Results from available studies show that adopting such inclusive programmes targeted mainly towards children with disability benefited the majority of non-disabled pupils. This was seen in a poor, multicultural, inner-city neighbourhood in the Newham borough of London where conscious efforts to phase out segregation and to adopt an inclusive neighbourhood schools system resulted in the biggest improvement nationally in GCSE results of all students in grades A-G (Rouse and Florian 1996; Rieser 2006).

On the other hand, segregated education shows unequal opportunities, especially in the index of self-esteem on which children with disability who went to special schools scored significantly lower compared to those who went to mainstream schools (Hirst and Baldwin 1994). The average point score of school leaving examinations for pupils in special schools was found to be seven times below the average of pupils with disability in mainstream schools (Dyson et al 2004).²

4.1 Inclusive Practices

I will list here some of the arrangements that can be made to bring disability equality in education, we will see in the next section,

how some of these are legally sanctioned and therefore can be implemented to provide skills and opportunities to live a full and active life, ameliorating, thus, discrimination in educational provisions that according to Colin Barnes (Barnes 1991), “largely condition them to accepting much devalued social roles and in doing so condemns them to lifetime of dependence and subordination”.

(i) Accessibility of both the school's physical and learning environments be carried out and the estimated cost included in school development plans. These must involve pupils and teachers with disability.

(ii) Curriculum restructuring must be done to include disability issues and positive portrayal of people with disability in a non-patronising way and in non-stereotyped activities and roles (Rieser 2006). It would be absolutely wrong to think that by not including disability issues and people with disability, the curriculum is absolved of the guilt of a negative portrayal of disability; in fact, this type of non-inclusion, what I call “blackening out”, is a more dangerous form of denial of rightful location in culture, much of the media and literature is equally guilty of this denial.

(iii) Include facilities and services geared towards pupil with disability, for example, provision for teaching through Sign Language when the class includes deaf children. Offer, for example, hearing students the chance to study Sign Language as a part of the curriculum. Remember that

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“effective pedagogy for students with disability is effective pedagogy for all students” (Adams and Brown 2006).

(iv) Design assessment instruments that enable equivalent and equitable assessment experience for the pupil with disability, and not simply extra time and separate rooms. It is well known that inequitable assessment criteria disfavours a child with disability and the said instruments must be designed to provide a positive experience (and not simply a diluted version) of the assessment.

(v) Engage in effective staff development and training, both academic and non-academic, by encouraging learner-centred, non-behaviouristic (not indulging in task-analysis, drills, and rote memorisation) approaches to teaching/learning.

(vi) Discourage and criticise disablist language use and impairment-driven abuse and name calling or bullying by building up an affirmative school policy.

(vii) Employ more teaching and non-teaching staff with disability in schools.

(viii) Identify similar issues and challenges that are faced across disabilities and institutions and build up constructive partnerships between schools and practitioners so that effective sharing of resources and solutions can take place.

5 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

The RTE Act promises to guarantee free and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14. Although devoid of obvious segregationist terminologies, it does little to encourage inclusive education. In fact, Chapter IV, Article 12 (c) which ensures at least 25% enrolment from “weaker and disadvantaged” section, applies to unaided and “specified category”³ schools. Although, as I will show in Section 6 that this is a step towards achieving “co-enrolment”, a most desirable generalised solution to inclusive education, by not including other types of schools in the ambit of this section, by itself and in conjunction with other implicational aspects of the Act, it tacitly encourages integration and maintains silence over inclusion.

The arbitrariness and artificiality of the age range (6-14 or till completion of elementary education or class VIII) is somewhat overcome for the education of children

with disability since by Chapter II, Article 3 (2), the right to education of a child with disability is to be governed as per the sanctions of the PWD Act 1995, and in the latter, in Chapter V, Article 26 (a), free and compulsory education is ensured till the age of 18. However, it is well known that due to a variety of reasons, educational progression of a student with disability is slower than average and it is rarely the case that a student with disability is able to appear for the final school leaving examination by age 18. Both the RTE and the PWD Acts thus fail to see through the continued and successful school education of a child with disability.⁴

The other highly problematic area of the Act for disability education is in Chapter IV, Article 19, subsection (2), (emphasis mine):

(2) Where a school established before the commencement of this Act not fulfil the norms and standards specified in the Schedule, it shall take steps to fulfil such norms and standards *at its own expenses*, within a period of three years from the date of such announcement.

This is very similar to the 1981 Education Act of the United Kingdom (UK) encouraging inclusion of special needs children in mainstream schools, which nonetheless, provided no extra resources for this purpose. It is also important to note that the Schedule of Norms and Standards referred to above include barrier-free access, and by this Act, most schools functioning and that exist today without barrier-free access, will use the pretext of lack of sufficient funds to refuse to make any structural changes in the school environment or make only cosmetic alterations. The government’s direct refusal to provide funding for creating barrier-free access is as good as encouraging the status quo to continue as far as education of children with disability is concerned.

However, the major lacuna in the RTE with respect to education of children with disability has been the interpretation of the phrase “child belonging to disadvantaged group”. In the preliminaries (Chapter I, Article 2, subsection (d)) the following is mentioned:

(d) “child belonging to disadvantaged group” means a child belonging to the Scheduled Caste, the Scheduled Tribe, and socially and educationally backward class or such other group having disadvantage

owing to social, cultural, economical, geographical, linguistic, gender or such other factor, as may be specified by the appropriate Government by notification.

The deliberate exclusion of children with disability from this group was justified by the provisions of the PWD Act and of Section 3(2) of the present Act which takes care of children with disability. However, as pointed out at the beginning of this section, since the 25% compulsory enrolment of Article 12(1)(c) applies only to this group as defined, children with disability do not fall within the purview of this percentage. Also discrimination against children with disability for the purpose of education cannot be ensured if they are not thus included since they will fall outside the purview of Articles 8(c) and 9(c), which are part of duties of appropriate governments and local authorities:

(c) ensure that the child belonging to weaker section and the child belonging to disadvantaged group are not discriminated against and prevented from pursuing and completing elementary education on any grounds.

Note though that if the social model of disability is embraced whereby disability is seen as the result of disabling social and physical barriers, children with disability will fall under this group. However, upon persistent demands, the union cabinet on 24 December 2009 approved an amendment to include, among other things, children with disability within the meaning of “children belonging to disadvantaged group”. We must, however, ensure that this amendment clearly dissociates itself from including children with disability within the meaning of the phrase “child belonging to weaker section” so that we can truly leave the medical model behind.

5.1 RTE to Work for Inclusion

In this section, I will claim that making the RTE to work for inclusion is indeed possible, and thus RTE is certainly a step ahead in terms of the RTE of children with disability, though much improvement in the Act in general remains to be done. Be that as it may, what I outline here forms the basis of an action plan for a disability rights movement as far as right to education is concerned; much of this activism is ideally carried out through legal action.

I will specifically argue that the inclusive practices from (i) to (viii) suggested in Section 4.1 are legally workable as they fall directly or indirectly (that is, by implication) within the reach of the RTE Act. The various practices listed there fall within the following six broad categories, each of which is addressed in the RTE somehow or other: (a) Accessibility, (b) Curriculum, (c) Services and Training, (d) Assessment, (e) Harassment, and (f) Others.

Each of these, I will elaborate in separate subsections below.

5.1.1 Accessibility, as mentioned above in connection with Article 19(2), is a noticeable part of the Schedules of Norms and Standards. Although in connection with 19(2), I painted the dismal scenario of the Act covertly discouraging accessibility, if it is however read along with Article 21(2): The School Management Committee shall perform the following function, subsection (b): prepare and recommend a school development plan, much of the requirement of accessibility as suggested in (i) (Section 4.1) can be salvaged, especially since the School Management Committee must include a proportionate representation from parents and guardians of children belonging to disadvantaged groups (Article 21(1), third proviso).

Furthermore, Article 22(2) ensures grants for implementation of the School Development Plan:

(2) The School Development Plan so prepared under subsection (1) shall be the basis for the plans and grants to be made by the appropriate Government or local authority, as the case may be.

Thus the problematic 19(2) when read along with 21(2) and 22(2) as above, nullifies the detrimental implication of the government's refusal to allocate extra funds for barrier-free access. Although the PWD Act ensured much of barrier-free access for education, employment and public facilities, the scope of accessibility must be enlarged to mean, apart from the physical, also communicative, social, attitudinal, educational, and institutional accessibility. This is largely accepted as a fuller definition of accessibility within the disability literature but rarely implemented as a legal instrument.

5.1.2 Although curriculum finds a whole chapter devoted to it (Chapter v), the scope

of developing inclusive practices within a curriculum is limited and an appeal must be made to other sections for effecting a curriculum change. An appropriate academic authority formed by the central government (Article 29(1)), has vested in it the right to develop a framework of national curriculum (Article 7(6)(a)) and furthering innovations. It shall also take into consideration conformity with the values enshrined in the Constitution, and developing the child's abilities to the fullest extent through a child-centred learning approach (Article 29(2)(a), (d), (e), and (f)).

5.1.3 Article 4, second proviso, is important with respect to availing of special services in the form of special training, which is targeted towards children returning to education or beginning school education late

– quite often the case with many children with disability. Such special training also falls within the duties of the government and local authorities as specified in Articles 8(e) and 9(g). Article 38(2)(a) ensures the possibility of specifying the manner and time limit of such special training.

Also falls among the services, especially for deaf students, are the two important subsections ((a) and (f)) of Article 29(2) referred to earlier wherein the academic authority appointed by the central government must take into consideration: (a) conformity with the values enshrined in the Constitution; and (f) medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue.

As I will point out in Section 6, Article 29 of the Constitution (Bakshi 2009)

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guarantees minority rights through mother tongue education. This is particularly relevant for a deaf child since Sign Language is the mother tongue of such a child. We can also look back at Article 2(d) discussed in Section 5 in this connection. This article is about the intended semantics of the phrase “child belonging to disadvantaged group” and allows, among other things, linguistic basis for defining a group. Quite clearly then, on the basis of Article 29(2) (a) and (f), a deaf child can be considered to be a part of the above group even without the recent amendment referred to earlier in Section 5.

Teacher training to improve facilities and encourage inclusive practices is covered under Articles 7(6)(b) and 9(j) and should be aggressively implemented to inculcate learner-centred, non-behaviouristic teaching/learning approaches as suggested in (v) of Section 4.1 above.

5.1.4 Assessment and evaluation need extra attention within the context of right to education of children with disability, the criteria prevailing for evaluation discriminate children with disability by insisting on traditional modes of examination. The development of individualised education programmes can be implemented on the basis of Article 24(1)(d) which includes among the duties of the teacher to also “assess the learning ability of each child and accordingly supplement additional instructions, if any, as required”. Furthermore, Article 29(2)(h) ensures consideration of “comprehensive and continuous evaluation” by the academic authority constituted by the central government for curriculum development and completion of elementary education. However, as I suggested in (iv) of Section 4.1, a mere dilution of the general evaluation procedure is demeaning for a child with disability and an equitable evaluation must be found in its place; Article 8(g) in fact ensures good quality education conforming to the Standards and Norms specified in the Schedule.

5.1.5 Disablist language use and abuse can be prevented (as suggested in (vi) of Section 4.1 above) by a fuller interpretation of Article 17(1): No child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment, and punishable under Article 17(2): Whoever contravenes the provisions of subsection (1) shall be liable to disciplinary

action under the service rules applicable to such person. Furthermore, Article 29 in connection with designing of the curriculum and an evaluation procedure, bestows the power on the academic authority to consider “making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely”.

5.1.6 The last category, which I have identified as Other, includes issues such as employment of PwD in schools and transfer of knowledge across disabilities and institutions. These are issues that are more than adequately accounted for through the PwD Act 1995, especially the whole of its Chapter VI, and Articles 47, 48 and 49 of Chapters VII and IX.

We see, therefore, that though sometimes lost in the zest for activism, a careful deliberation of the RTE provides a legal framework for implementing an inclusive educational environment for children with disability.

6 Deaf Education: Problem of Inclusion

Sign language provides a shared experience for deaf people the world over and thus their rightful claim to a deaf culture. India is home to about 5-6 million deaf people, out of which, about 1.5 million have access to sign language. There are also about 500 deaf schools serving only 7% of the deaf population. Furthermore, as has been convincingly shown in studies on cognitive development, language is the medium which facilitates the articulation of the “self”. In other words, language is a prerequisite for identity formation, self-understanding and autonomy, language and cognitive development depend on each other.

With this background, as I pointed out in Section 5.1.3, Protection of Minority Rights as in Article 29 of the Constitution (Bakshi 2009), falling under cultural and educational right, although named as Protection of interests of minorities can be invoked for education of deaf children through sign language similar to any other mother tongue (Bhattacharya and Haobam (forth):

Article 29: Protection of interests of minorities
(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve them.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

With these Acts in place and 29(2)(f) of the RTE guaranteeing education through mother tongue, providing for teaching through sign language in classrooms with deaf students to practise inclusion should be no problem. However, inclusion in deaf education is not straightforward.

In terms of personal and social characteristics, experiences of deaf students in mainstream schools/classes have been found to be less positive than in deaf schools or separate classes (Foster and Emerton 1991; Moores 1996; Kluwin, Stinson and Cicerini 2002). Social skills measured through Meadow-Kendall Socio-Emotional Inventory (Meadow 1983), found no clear difference in social skills and affective characteristics of students in special schools compared to those in separate classes or mainstream schools (Stinson and Kluwin 2003). Similar results were obtained for self-esteem, measured in the Piers-Harris self-esteem scale. In fact, one study (Murphy and Newlon 1987) found post-secondary deaf students to be significantly lonelier than hearing students in mainstream classes. In general, for deaf students, social environment of special schools and separate classes appear to be more positive than mainstream or general education classes.

It is tempting therefore to conclude that within the context of deaf education, a strong sense of identity through sharing of sign language and deaf culture among the deaf students override the many benefits of inclusion. This conclusion however creates confusion in terms of the right to inclusive education of children with disability in general. It also makes sharing of resources and expertise through transference and constructive partnerships across disabilities and institutions, suggested as a criterion for practising inclusion in (viii) in Section 4.1, difficult.

Fortunately, there exists in the typology of schools and classes another type of placement that prompts us to rethink this discrepancy and propose a generalised education policy of embracing inclusion for all. Co-enrolment refers to classrooms

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that include both deaf and hearing students, ideally in equal numbers, where teaching takes place in both sign language and spoken language (Stinson and Kluwin 2003). Co-enrolment classes are the nearest one can approach inclusion in deaf education.

A few available studies on this type of placement suggest that deaf students in this setting have more positive interaction experiences than in mainstream schools (Kirchner 1994). Furthermore, Kluwin (1999) found no difference in self-esteem between deaf and hearing students enrolled in co-enrolment classes. Deaf people self-report about friends and of a rich social life at (deaf) schools whereas hard-of-hearing people who attended mainstream schools often report of suffering from loneliness, not having friends and being assigned an inferior role in social settings with peers (Padden and Humphries 1988; Ladd 2003). Co-enrolment classes/schools are clearly the way to go. However, there are only a handful of cases where co-enrolment classes have been run successfully (in the context of deaf education), only with the services of motivated teachers and staff, can this be a real alternative.

7 Conclusions

In concluding, I will outline a three-pronged strategy for drawing up a framework of theory and practice for achieving the RTE of all children with disability.

Strategy I: Even if idealistic, push for inclusion in education (as suggested in Section 4.1), otherwise the symbolic problem of special schools – as long as there are special schools/institutions, mainstream schools will not change their ethos to accommodate children with disability – will continue to haunt us.

Strategy II: Activism should be goal-directed to push for implementation and amendments in the RTE as indicated in Section 5.1.

Strategy III: Work towards adoption of co-enrolment classes/schools as a generalised inclusive policy in the education of children with disability.

With the conviction that a disability-driven education system is empowering for all people and forms of knowledge, if such a change in ethos is brought about, we will all benefit.

NOTES

- 1 The collective term, although disfavoured in the context of the usage followed in this article, is being retained here since it is a part of the original document. It may be also important to state here that there are distinct claims associated with the usage of one as opposed to the other sequence of phrases, namely, “disabled persons” and ‘persons with disability’. However, following the latter usage for the purpose of this article does not necessarily mean that I must subscribe to all the associated claims, neither it is an indication that this is a more acceptable term. In fact, many verb-final languages (like Bangla or Hindi/Urdu) do not even permit the post-nominal adjectival usage, and the only way to legally use the sequence in those languages would be Adjective + Noun, i.e., “disabled persons”. It is easy to see therefore why the debate arose in the context of the Anglo-American literature on disability. See Bhattacharya (ms, 2009) for further discussion.
- 2 I will show in Section 6, how the situation is not as straightforward for deaf children going to special schools and mainstream schools.
- 3 This category in Chapter I, Article 2 (p) includes Kendriya Vidyalaya (KV), Navodaya, Sainik Schools but also “any other school having a distinct character which may be specified”, thereby letting special schools through the backdoor.
- 4 However, the centrally sponsored scheme of *Integrated Education of the Disabled* [sic] at Secondary Stage or IEDSS of 2009 has the following as a part of its recommendations:
(4) At the Secondary level, young persons with disabilities beyond 18 years will be supported for a period up to four years to help them complete secondary schooling.
However, as is clear, this is far from an Act.

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