

## TEACHING COMPETENCIES IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Inclusive education is a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to learn how to learn from the differences. The literature on inclusive education suggests that no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students with disabilities. Thus teachers are now required to adapt instruction to make special needs students responsive, use individualized instructions, work collaboratively with parents and other professionals and use technology to assist students to overcome their shortfalls.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Inclusive Education, Individualized Strategies, Educational Need, Social Need, Technology*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Inclusion includes quality and equitable education for all, without any type of exclusion, including those who are potentially marginalized due to disability, gender, emotional or behavioral problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness, migrants, poverty, hearing or visual impairment, language delay, among others. It means the inclusion of individuals with temporary or permanent disabilities as well as those with outstanding aptitudes. United Nations World Declaration on Education for All, (EFA) (1990) which reiterated the rights of all children comprising of children with special needs to access education in regular school settings. The principle of inclusive education emphasized that "children with special needs must have access to regular schools ". A well-known quote in this context is "change the environment to suit the child, not the child to suit the environment".

It refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social-emotional, linguistic or other conditions. Inclusive education is about embracing all (NCF-2005). An inclusive class may have amongst others, differently able children or gifted children, street or working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children belonging to ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities or children from other disadvantaged or marginalized groups. Inclusive Education means all learners, young people with or without disabilities being able to learn together in ordinary preschool provisions, schools, and community educational settings with an appropriate network of support service. Schools need to become a center that prepares children for life and ensure that all children, especially the differently able children from marginalized sections (NCF, 2005). In overall terms, Inclusive education implies four key elements:

- It is a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to learn how to learn from the differences;
- It is stimulating through multiple strategies, the creativity and the capacity of addressing and resolving problems of students;
- It comprises the right of the child to attend school, express his/her opinion, have quality learning experiences and attain valuable learning outcomes; and
- It implies the moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes.

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion thus they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment. For a smooth transition from mainstream education to inclusive education, the role of the teacher in a changing environment has also required a change. A change will not yield the desired results if those who implement it are resistant or are not committed. Teachers are required to reconsider their roles, construct new knowledge and learn new skills to equip themselves for the change. Teachers may need to acquire new skills and reject some of their beliefs and practices. According to Mastropieri & Scruggs, (2010) teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education. The literature on inclusive education suggests that no matter how excellent the educational infrastructure might be, how well articulated educational policy might be, how well resourced a program might be, effective inclusion does not take place until regular classroom teachers deliver relevant and meaningful instruction to students with disabilities. The teacher has to provide holistic support and focused involvement with the children with special needs based on a joint perspective, mutual understanding, and networking. Teachers with the support of the principal of the school, colleagues, special educators and parents should develop effective ways of overcoming barriers to learning.

The inclusion of differently able students in regular education classrooms requires regular school teachers to upgrade their skills in-order to respond to the new challenges provided by their changing roles and responsibilities. These teachers are now expected to address problems and provide solutions to challenges posed by special needs students who may vary in their skill levels. Inclusion requires a large vision and specific competencies for teachers. The teachers need to know that diversity is present in the classroom and that they should attend to diverse needs. Three important educational aspects that every teacher must know to be inclusive:

**Equality:** Promoting the same opportunities for all.

**Quality:** Offering functional and meaningful learning.

**Equity:** Responding to special educational needs.

In inclusive education, the school and classrooms are very dynamic and have a lot of interactions and roles. Recognizing that the other, is not a continuation of me, but has its own view leads teachers to explain, interpret and act from their point of view. This vision then transforms from two ideas (you and me) to a new figure (us).

Kochhar and West (1996) laid stress that, in inclusive education classrooms regular school teachers are required to teach 'content' differently. It must be integrative, flexible and interdisciplinary. In contrast to the traditional classroom now the focus shifts from teaching to learning. Teachers are now required to create situations in which a student's learning is

maximized. The regular classroom teacher is now viewed as a "thoughtful professional", one who is able to understand the relationship between teaching and learning. Thus the roles and responsibilities of regular school teachers have now been comprehensive. It is therefore vital that regular school teachers have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to fulfill their new roles and responsibilities. As Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) state, better expertise in classroom management so that more time can be provided to instruction; knowing how to teach mixed-ability classes; increasing awareness and becoming proficient in new teaching strategies like co-operative learning or 'whole language' approaches to learning; and able to respond to the different learning styles of their pupils – attention to all these things can certainly help teachers increase their pupils opportunities to learn.

According to Mastropieri & Scruggs (2010), regular school teachers should know about the learning styles and the motivational patterns of differently able children. The teachers must have an understanding of the resources available to help them in working with students with disabilities. They should present information to the students in a manner which enables them to assimilate the information easily. Vaughn & Bos (2012) suggested a number of strategies that regular school teachers would require in order to accommodate students with disabilities in the classroom environment. These include peer tutoring, mastery learning, cooperative learning, and applied behavior analysis. The Council for Exceptional Children (2010) developed and validated a common core of minimum essential knowledge and skills necessary for entry into professional practice in special education. "It includes — philosophical, historical and legal foundations of special education; characteristics of learners; assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation; instructional content and practice; planning and managing the learning environment; managing student behavior and social interaction skills; communication and collaborative partnerships and; professionalism and ethical practices." While all of these skills may not be needed for regular classroom teachers, a certain level of ability in these competencies, however, is required from these teachers when they are expected to work with special needs children. There are some competencies that are field tested and supported as probable methods for delivering effective instruction to students with diverse learning needs. These are:

**Believing in Students:** A teacher must believe in **the** student's possibilities and support systems with a clear vision that all children can learn. In this way, she will help in preventing the barriers and limitations of learning that could marginalize children and young people from their potential. It also includes learning conception, individual differences, the values of solidarity, respect, and collaboration. The inclusive teacher should recognize individual differences and participate in collective teaching because it is essential in implementing education of diversity. The inclusive teacher should have a holistic educational view with strong skills and experience in order to participate in diverse contexts.

**Knowledge of Terminology of Inclusive Education:** Knowledge in the context of inclusive education includes a knowledge and understanding of basic terminology and concepts used in special education; history of inclusive education; policies, programs and legislation related to inclusive education; rights, roles and responsibilities of parents, students, teachers and other professionals.

**Cooperation from Other Staff:** An ever-increasing diversity in the classrooms has made it necessary for regular classroom teachers to work with special education teachers, school psychologists, professionals (such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, recreational therapists etc.) parents of students with disabilities etc. This will help in having fewer problems and this will be an effective method to utilize each teacher's strengths.

**Skills of Classroom Management:** Along with the psycho-social environment, the physical aspects of the classroom also exert a great influence on the inclusive classroom environment. The physical environment comprises of aspects such as an arrangement of desks, lighting, and temperature. Thus a teacher must have knowledge of classroom management theories, methods, and techniques for individuals with different learning needs; research-based best practices for effective management of teaching and learning; materials arrangement creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom and organization of aids and support services.

**Techniques of Assessment:** Assessment -formal and informal is one of the most vital skills for a regular classroom teacher to have in the implementation of inclusive education programs. The teacher has to employ both, basic skills such as gathering, learning, and background information of differently able students and also highly specialized skills such as selecting, administering, scoring and interpreting standardized measurement instruments. She has to evaluate three aspects of differently able students' performance while evaluating their success in inclusion programs-performance, attitudes, and process. Performance measures student's achievement in content areas. Attitude measures differently able student's self-concept and their attitudes toward their teachers and non-disabled peers. Process measures the types of interactions differently able students have with their teachers and peers. Thus performance-based assessments, portfolios and curriculum-based assessments are to be used by the teacher.

**Techniques of Instructions:** A number of specific instructional techniques that regular classroom teachers would require to be competent to include -activity based and peer tutoring, experiential learning, and collaborative learning. With the use of both activity-based and experiential learning, students become involved in the discovery, interaction with the environment and manipulation of materials. As this learning uses real-life activities and materials, skill generalization and transfer are facilitated. Peer tutoring is another instructional strategy that involves student partnerships, involving high achievers with lower achievers. Peer tutoring has been found to minimize problem behaviors, increase opportunities to respond and improve activity comprehension (Marchand-Martella & Martella, 1993). Cooperative learning encourages students to work together to complete tasks and solve problems. The teachers need to specify each student's role for the task, clarify the sequence of activities and monitor and evaluate the interactions between the group members. Putnam, (1998) these approaches enhance learning, improve inter-group relations, develop problem-solving skills and improve the academic and social skills of students with special needs in regular education classrooms.

**Individualized Instruction:** Individualized instructions are educational approaches that recognize, anticipate and program for variation according to the student's background knowledge, learning styles, motivation and personal interest. Creating an educational program that is tailored to the unique needs of a differently able child is the hallmark of special education. This is what makes special education different from regular education. However, a union of both well-established stream of instruction is needed from regular school teachers if they are to serve all students in their classrooms including those with exceptionality. It requires teachers to implement alternative teaching actions such as modifying assignments, materials, testing procedures, grading criteria and varying presentation styles in order to improve the achievement of differently able students in regular education classrooms. Teachers can also accommodate variations in learning styles by using a variety of environmental, physical, social and psychological conditions.

**Use of Technology:** Use of technology for special needs students has made it possible for to accomplish a number of tasks while being in a regular education environment that was not possible earlier. Apart from the "traditional" knowledge and skill domains, regular school teachers are now also expected to demonstrate ability in the use of technology.

To sum up, equity and integration of education for these students do not only mean to simply enroll them into regular schools or classrooms. It means that physical and psychological barriers between these children and the others are broken. Teachers in the traditional mode are likely to view these children — incapable, difficult to handle, or merely worthy of segregation into special schools. These children require physical and emotional acceptance at home and at school. They need a flexible curriculum, barrier-free classroom or school environment, modified schemes of examination and teaching practices, adapted teaching aids and above all-a sensitive teacher. It is necessary that teachers take the responsibility for improving the learning and involvement of all children in their classes. For this, teachers need to develop competencies that comprise knowledge & skills to teach equitably and to encourage the learning of all pupils. Moreover, teachers need to be able to pursue and practice the support of other people who can serve as valuable resources in inclusive education, such as support staff, parents, communities, school authorities and not to miss the relevant others. Teachers can be benefited by the approach of Inclusive education in various ways. Inclusive education can be achieved in the true sense by understanding the diversity of individual human being, recognizing that all students have strengths and potential, the significance of individualized instruction, ways of creatively addressing challenges, problem-solving skills and skills related to teamwork.

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