STUDYING SPECIAL PROGRAM COMPONENT IN REGULAR SCHOOL SET UPS WITH THE AIM OF EVOLVING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

SUMMARY

Ph.D. Thesis

shruti bhargava
May, 2006
STUDYING SPECIAL PROGRAM COMPONENT IN REGULAR SCHOOL SET UPS WITH THE AIM OF EVOLVING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

SUMMARY of DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

PROF.(DR.) PRERANA MOHITE
Research Guide

MS. SHRUTI BHARGAVA
Student

Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Faculty of Home Science
The M.S. University of Baroda
VADODARA

May, 2006
INTRODUCTION

Disability is a relative term, since different cultures define their norms differently. Concepts of disability are therefore situation bound, contextual and can be subjective (Ingstad and Whyte 1995; Pandey and Advani 1995; Harriss-White 1995). ‘Economically oppressive and socially tyrannical and politically disenfranchising forms of work such as child labour and bonded labour are sometimes considered disabling’ (Harriss-White 1995). The socially and economically disadvantaged child, living within a situation of grinding poverty, with no services, can be seriously disabled by its situation and by the environmental milieu. In a tradition bound society like India, stratified by caste, class, religion, rich and poor, male and female, social attitudes can disable a person (Alur 1988; Pandey and Advani 1995; Harriss-White 1995). Disability can be regarded as taboo, a retribution for past sins committed, stigmatizing a child, cutting across economic boundaries. Societal attitudes can be more disabling than the functional loss of a limb.

It is therefore important to examine how families cope and adapt to stressor events over time, for example, the birth and parenting of a child with special needs. In addition, existing stressors, such as responsibility for other family members and meeting financial obligations, must be included into a study of a family’s ability to function optimally. Family resources and family supports may bolster a family’s ability to meet the needs of each individual in the family and realize the goals of the family. The perception of the stressor event by the family is also critical in determining how it will adjust to stressor events. (Richey, & Wheeler, 2000).

Parental reactions and feelings are affected by time of occurrence of disability, severity, attitude of relatives, friends, neighbours and community. Also factors like whether the child can become an integral part of the community, parental temperament and personality, monetary status of parents, time they can spare have significant effects on parental emotions/reactions. (IGNOU, 1995).

Most parents with children having special needs go through a range of emotions. These may be — shock / disbelief, guilt, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, shame, acceptance (IGNOU, 1995).

The Karmic theory of traditional Hindus, about the present being a reflection of past deeds is strongly entrenched. There is a belief that the family and the disabled child’s misery in this life were a result of past life. The neighbours tend to taunt the family whenever there are quarrels, and bring up the fact that they are cursed because they have a disabled child.
Some are even told to ‘forget’ the disabled child and look ahead. (Alur, 2003).

The position of parents in programs for their children with special needs does not seem to be spelt out very clearly in most cases. According to a current review of approaches by UNESCO (1997) the partnership between parents and professional can be placed on a continuum. The following models can emerge –

1. Professional responsible for taking all decisions about special child. Parent has no role to play.
2. Professionals decides what is to be done. Parent gets trained to deliver services.
3. Professionals and parents take joint decisions.
4. Parents are decision makers and decide on services for child.
5. Parents are solely responsible to develop and deliver services – CBR prog.

Inclusion is a principle that arose in the 1980’s and early 1990’s as a response to the fact that only children with less severe disabilities will be placed in normal ECCE settings (Biklen 1985, Salisbury, 1991, Salisbury & Vincent, 1990). The principle advocates that irrespective of the severity children need to be placed in integrated settings. (Manegold, 1994).

Basic ECCD programs are in a position to offer special programs to children with special needs. This so because there is no basic difference between a quality early childhood ECCD) programme and an inclusive programme, they have many of the same characteristics.

The attitudes of all concerned in implementing a special program have been identified as major factors affecting its success or failure. (Hoad, 1998; Rose & Smith, 1993). Parents generally have held a positive attitude, specially if they have seen the program in action.

Parental observation of their child in action with normal peers works two ways – on one hand reassures them as they can see similarities while on the other it can cause distress as can also observe differences and difficulties faced by their child. Inclusive programs should therefore not only meet the needs of children but also be sensitive to needs of family (Bailey et al, 1998).

Early childhood teachers and care providers typically have little or no training in areas of disability and inclusion and so handling included
children challenges their feelings of self competency and ability regarding provision of an appropriate program. Inadequate staff training has been identified as a significant factor leading to failure of inclusive programs and infact teachers and care provides give highest priority to additional training in implementation of inclusive programs (Denholm, 1990; Fleming, 1992). They are of the opinion that training should be comprehensive, should have large component of practicals and behaviour management.

Therefore from the review what emerge as important variables related to a special program are those associated with –
- Parents attitude, coping.
- School policy, program implementation.
- Attitudes of those who are to implement and run the program.
- Societal variables in general.

These variables vis-à-vis the special program may be diagrammatically depicted as follows –

![Diagram showing variables related to special program]
OBJECTIVES

Broad Objective

Studying special program component in regular school set ups with the aim of evolving a conceptual framework.

Specific Objectives

1. Surveying of types of services available for special needs children in city of Baroda.
2. Studying inclusive practices as they exist in schools of Baroda.
3. Exploring views and understanding of school principals, teachers and parents of children with special needs regarding inclusive practices.
4. Developing minimal standards of quality for implementation of inclusive program.
5. Evolving a conceptual framework for offering an effective special program in a regular school setup.

METHODOLOGY

In the sections that follow details pertaining to the tools used for the study and the procedure adopted for sample selection and data collection has been presented.

Definitions

- SPECIAL NEEDS – Conditions which require specially designed programs and instructions so that maximum potentials are met. Can include conditions of impairment, disability, handicap.

- SPECIAL PROGRAM – Specially designed instruction / aids that would meet the unique needs of special children.

Research Design

The aim of the study was to establish basic minimum requirements to implement an inclusive program. Based on these findings was formulated a conceptual framework which could be emulated by other schools who opt to offer such a program. The study thus was an exploratory study; descriptive in nature. Qualitative data was collected using multiple methods consisting of observation; interview of parents, teachers; draw and dialogue with parents and chapatti diagrams with teachers. Data was collected in natural settings of school and home.
**Sample**

The sample for the study comprised of the following groups –
- Children with special needs in regular school set ups.
- Parents of these children.
- Class teachers.
- School principals / administrators.

The total sample size was 40 drawn from the only two English medium schools in Baroda offering special programs for special needs children.

The two schools that formed the context of the study were –
1. Shaishav School (School–1)
2. Mira – The Happy School (School–2)

Both the schools offer special programs in their regular classes to children with a range of special needs. The special conditions associated with the children were mental retardation, down’s syndrome, learning disability, behaviour disorders, speech / communication problems, physical disabilities etc. The children were spread across Nursery to grade VIII in the regular classes. Children beyond grade VIII were enrolled in the National Open School Scheme of the two schools in a different section.

From each school five special children spread across different grades were selected. The parents of these children, class teachers, special educator and school principal formed the total sample of 40.

![Sample distribution](image)

**Figure.** Sample distribution.

\[ N = 40 \]
Criteria for sample selection

The sample was purposive in nature.

1. Children with special needs (Down's syndrome, mild to moderately retarded) who were being offered special programs in regular classes. Only these categories were selected to have a cohesive group in terms of gross indicators.

2. Teachers and special educators who were directly involved in planning, implementing, upgrading and monitoring the inclusive program.

3. School principal/administrator involved in taking policy decisions regarding programs for these children.

4. Parents of special needs children.

Tools and Techniques for data collection

The following tools were used to collect the data:

- Indepth semi structured interview schedules for –
  - Parents
  - Teachers/special educator
  - Principal / Administrator
- Checklist for parents
- Observations
- Draw and dialogue
- Chappatti diagram.

1. Indepth semi structured interview schedules –

A set of three indepth semi structured interview schedules were developed to be used with parents, teachers and principals / administrator of school.

- The Interview schedule for parents aimed at –
  - Parents understanding and knowledge of:
    - child's disability
    - child's present developmental status and readiness for the inclusion program inclusion program.
  - Advantages / disadvantages of the inclusion program.
  - Attitudes of relatives / society / teachers towards their special child.
  - Satisfactions / dissatisfactions with the program.
  - Alternate therapies if any being used.
  - What / how have parents been able to build up their capacities to understand and cope with the situation.
  - Views on parent school partnership.
The mother and father were separately interviewed.

- The second interview schedule for teachers aimed to explore the following:
  - Teachers competence and confidence to offer an inclusive program.
  - Did they get any specific / related inputs in their pre / in service training.
  - Ways in which a regular class room teacher should / can equip herself.
  - Sources of help are available to them in planning / implementing a special program.
  - What changes (if any) required or made in the program.
  - Problems faced vis-à-vis the special program.
  - Advantages/disadvantages of such a program.
  - Attitudes of children and other parents.

- **Principals / Administrators**
  - The school policy vis-à-vis children with special needs.
  - Why did they decide to offer such a program – views on inclusion.
  - Changes required at various levels – administrative, infrastructure, equipment, program etc.
  - Restrictions / constraints / opposition.
  - Resolving problems in way of the inclusive program.
  - Alternatives to inclusion.

2. **Checklist for parents**

   In addition to the parental interview a checklist was also prepared. The checklist was based on coping behaviour stages proposed by Duncan. The checklist yielded information on how parents coped up with presence of a special child in the family. The broad stages were – shock, denial, bargaining, depression, anger/aggression and acceptance.

   The descriptions given for each of these stages were converted into statements which the parents responded to.

3. **Classroom Observation**

   Event sampling was used to record the child's activities in school setup across various sessions through the day. These sessions were –

   - Formal ongoing academic class session.
   - Informal activities like art, song, free play.
   - Lunch / snack time.
   - Morning arrival time.
• Going home time.
• Outdoor play.
• Outdoor play.

Each of these sessions were observed for the full time which was 25-30 minutes. Thus for each child a total of 2½ - 3 hours of observations in ongoing class sessions was done.

4. Draw and Dialogue

For part of the parent sample (n=10) the draw and dialogue technique was used to get data on future aspirations they hold for their special child. Drawings of various aspects of life can be useful tools. Drawings can be used in different ways, for example: to illustrate something they are trying to explain; to provide insights into areas of their lives, for example 'homelife', 'running away' or 'hopes and dreams'; to illustrate ideas and identify criteria for preference, for example, what is a 'good thing', a 'bad thing', a good or a bad person.

Chapatti Diagram

The teachers sample drawn from Shaishav school were asked to depict the place that the special program holds in their roles and responsibilities in the school set up using the chapatti diagram. This was done in addition to the interview.

**Tool Validation**

All the above mentioned interview schedules and parental checklist were formulated by the researcher. These tools were subjected to validation by a range of experts from the fields of Human Development and Family Studies, Social Work, Education and Psychology, administrator of NGO working with special children and local pediatrician.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was done on four subjects. Pilot study was conducted to adopt and get accustomed with the tool of the study and to check for its validity in terms of the objectives laid down for the study. It helped in refining the schedule in terms of reframing the language, reorganizing the sequence of questions and probes used.
Procedure for Data Collection

**Step I** Permission from school principals.
- The two school principals were approached and appointment for the first meeting was fixed.
- The entire research idea in terms of objectives and design were discussed with the principal.
- Permission was sought to carry out the procedure in the school setting and also contact and procure data from parents at home.

**Step II** Sample Selection.
- School records were scrutinised to identify the number of children with special needs enrolled and the grades across which they were spread.
- Keeping in mind the sample criteria children were selected.
- Consent forms were sent to parents for observing their child in class and for interviewing them.

**Step III** Observations in school.
- After school and parent permission was obtained classroom observations of ongoing sessions were made in school.
- Simultaneously interviews of teachers, special educator and principal were carried out as and when it was convenient for them.

**Step IV** Parental interviews.
- Parental interviews were conducted at the home, separately for fathers and mothers by taking prior appointments.
- For each parent at least two meetings were required in order to obtain complete data from the interview, checklist and draw and dialogue technique.
- For the classroom observations the researcher played the role of a non-participant observer.
- No attempt was made to participate or intervene in any ongoing activity in or out of the class.
- The activities undertaken by special child, regular children and the teacher in an ongoing session were recorded as continuous notes for the entire length of the session.

Note: The interview data was noted down verbatim as the respondents spoke
The following figure sums up the entire stepwise process.

Permission from school principals
(School 1 and School 2)

Sample selection and parental consent

Interview of teachers and principals in school

School observations of children.

Interview of parents at home

Basic minimum requirements for inclusion

Conceptual framework

Figure Procedure for data collection.

Analyses

The data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The data was processed as follows.

- Numeric codes were worked out for each child, parent and teacher.
- Data from interviews conducted in the home and school context were expanded and transcribed question wise as soon as it was collected. Data was translated to English and wherever relevant Gujarati verbatims were retained.
The following figure shows the process of data analyses at a glance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Sources of data</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Studying parental views about their child's school placement. | • Interview | • Descriptive Information  
• Transferred on coding sheet  
• Reduced into 4 major domains with sub sections  
• Frequencies |
| • Exploring the emotional reactions and coping strategies of parents related to their child's disability. | • Checklist | • Same as above |
| • Exploring the role of teachers, their attitude, and experiences in offering the special program. | • Interview  
• Ongoing Classroom Observation | • Same as above  
• Comparative analysis of behaviors shown by teachers, special child and other children in classroom with respect to ongoing sessions. |
| • Exploring the school's policies and procedures with regards to offering a special program. | • Interview of Principal | • Descriptive |
| • Understanding parental aspiration for special child. | • Draw and dialogue | • Descriptive |
| • Place of special program in teachers job tasks | • Chapatti Diagram | • Descriptive |

RESULTS

Parental Views

Parental understanding and coping

• There emerged clarity and consensus between parents about condition of the child, their strengths and weaknesses. Area requiring input according to fathers was mainly activities of daily living while for mothers it was academics.
• Coping behaviours reported were indicative of denial, bargaining, anger and acceptance
• Typical denial behaviours like shifting from doctor to doctor, feeling that there isn't much problem with child even after the condition was established and recognised by parents emerged clearly.
• Progress of child and betterment of child gets parents to indulge in bargaining behaviour like taking religious measures or engaging into “social work”.
• Anger as an emotional response emerged in all parents to a lesser or more degree, with tension about child's future (in case of fathers) and child's behaviour (in case of mothers) being prime reasons.
• Acceptance of child’s condition was reflected in behaviours like taking child out with themselves, being able to solicit help for self and child, being able to enlist child's strengths along with objectively knowing of weaknesses, being open to suggestions and readiness to implement them and majority of parents being able to pursue own hobbies.
• Mothers gave more inner directed emic responses to coping as compared to fathers. Dependence on religion and spirituality as coping means get reflected across various sources of data.

Parental aspirations for child
• The analysis of draw and dialogue highlights that the primary aspiration of parents for child is independence in future life. Academics does figure but parents do acknowledge that the child will not go through the whole range of learning but at least should be able to stand on own feet. Parents also hope for the child to be socially accepted.

School program
• The major satisfaction with the program that parents shared was the fact that the child had been included in the normal class and is happy to go to school. Parents have expressed hope that he/she will learn with normal children.
• One third of the parent sample reported no specific goals being set for these children. Some others did say that specific goals were set but could not elaborate on them. Fostering self dependence and social emotional independence were major areas being aimed at.
• Majority of the parents said that no specific diagnostic / screening measures were used and it emerged that parents were generally not clear of the evaluation process.

Parents suggested various ways of evaluation like –
• once a year along with other children
• according to list of questions
• through separate question papers given
• through class observations
• by a special educator
• on take home content.

• Inconsistency emerged in terms of reports of how the program was offered with half the parents saying IEP’s were used while the other half were of the opinion that specific need based planning was not done.
• Lack of clarity in understanding the process of promotion to next class emerged and thus varied responses like class observations, use of separate papers, evaluation by special educator emerged.
• All parents unanimously agree that there is no parent school partnership. Parents clearly indicated that the school authorities did not consult them in prioritising the inputs to be given to their child and no special/specific programs were organised for them. The only contact with school was through routine PTA meetings.
• Interestingly all would like to retain child in the school – the prime reason being no other good alternative being available.
• All parents have enunciated a host of suggestions with the aim to improve the program. More personal attention to the child, better program implementation and teacher training figure prominently in the suggestions.

Understanding and Views of School Staff

Conceptualisation of inclusion

• Inclusion as a concept was not defined by all teachers and theoretically by none.
• The objectives for inclusion as stated by the teachers included socio emotional, language development and to make children feel part of society. The cognitive training was left to the special educator. According to the special educator the goal was helping them academically to what ever extent possible.

Description of program facets

• Teachers see the program as worthwhile and successful as it fosters social development, belongingness to a group, increases self confidence, parents being happy.
• Major objectives of inclusion as stated by teachers emerged as socio emotional and language development. Cognitive inputs were left to the special educator.
• Teachers generally were not very clear about how inclusive program was offered to children across grades or if specific diagnostic/screening tests were used. They did report that IEPs were used (n=5), extra revision given (n=4), work was simplified (n=3) as means of offering program inputs to CSN. In the class room observations it emerged clearly that no differential program, aids, pace of teaching or monitoring was used.
• Socio emotional development (n=3), self help skills (n=4) and social interaction (n=6) were thrust areas for evaluation as stated by teachers. No mention was made of academics.
• Interaction with these children have touched their lives positively.

Role of self
• According to teachers their major role was geared to social aspects of development vis a vis the special child – teaching appropriate behaviour, sensitising normal children etc.
• Teacher training / background were not important criteria to place a special child in a class.
• No teacher training provided on job, extra help given by school as stated by teachers was not observed. Generally staff equipped themselves through reading books, interacting and seeking help from other staff, or depended on own previous training and experience.

Beliefs about inclusion
• Teachers see the need for inclusion and hope other schools will pick up.
• Teachers came up with suggestions like adding on staff, having prescribed curriculum. The special educator did suggest that class teachers need to give more time and opportunity to special children in class. She also laid emphasis on inputs parents need to give in training of special children.

Emerging Classroom Behaviours
Classroom observations yielded behaviours which could be classified into appropriate and inappropriate (disturbing, idiosyncratic, non-involvement, socially non adaptive) behaviours.
• Routine tasks like arrival, departure and lunch emerged as sessions where children exhibited maximum task related behaviour even in absence of adult.
• Adult inputs determine the performance of appropriate task related activity in formal reading/writing sessions which require goal directed activity and display of varied skills. Thus special education session had highest task related behaviours (70.8%) and highest adult input
while formal class had least goal directed behaviour (38.0%) and adult inputs (12.5%). Thus teacher inputs does increase childs task related behaviour.

- Teacher inputs across sessions (except special education class) were minimally directed to special children. Their behaviours were instructive, ignoring child, using negative comments at times, only monitoring from far and no pro active help/guidance.

Discussion

The principle of full inclusion has to an extent emerged from the basic premises of the concepts of “natural environment” and “least restrictive environment” and arose sometime in late 80’s and early 90’s (Bowen, 2000). Richey & Wheeler (2000) are of the opinion that an inclusive setting is desirable and a goal to be achieved for as many children with special needs as possible. In this process the wishes and priorities of family is of prime importance as far as any decision is to be made, since all families would wish for the special needs of their child to be met.

When one looks at the International and national level declarations, statements, frameworks, policies and ideologies and compares it with what is being practically implemented one finds a large gap in policy and practice. Though ideologically concept of inclusion has begun to gain acceptance as a viable means to provide educational services to children with special needs, in practice institutions who offer such services are very few. Also when these institutions at the local level were studied in detail, which was the aim of the present research there has emerged a lot of ad hocism in terms of planning, implementing, understanding of the process of inclusion and a wide gap in the goal set at the institutional level and what is being communicated to the parent group.

Thus, there emerge two main issues here. First - what is the school philosophy behind the inclusive program and what is being communicated to parents thus questioning position of parents in the entire set up. Second– Is focused attention by a single adult untrained to handle special children and program possible with class strength of 30-35 and if not, are alternatives like special class / section or centres a better option for special children. This issue also specifically has added dimensions like teacher training, teacher attitude and understanding of needs of special children.

Parent professional partnership as a necessity for any inclusive program finds support in literature and researches. According to Shea & Bauer (1985) parenting of a child requires inputs in the form of time, energy, thought for analysis, evaluation and integration of a host of factors related to their parenting perspectives and methods. Families play a key role in
early intervention and future development of their children. Thus collaboration is central to successful family / professional partnership. This partnership does not occur spontaneously and needs to be worked on as it is most beneficial to child with special needs. (Richey, & Wheeler, 2000). Early Childhood (EC) programs which include early childhood special education (ECSE) programs have long given importance to family involvement. The family friendly approach by ECSE practitioners began in the 1960-1970's which was responsible for family members and family being recognised as the constant in child's life with the understanding that childrens needs cannot be fully met unless family joins in the program. Further the family can be used to identify the resources, needs and priorities for the child with special needs.

A related issue is that of the teachers inputs vis-à-vis the class strength, teacher training and extra support available. Teacher involvement and training are suggestions that have come from the parents as a groups.

Literature reviewed has shown that to be able to develop inclusive schools it is essential to recruit teachers who are capable of serving as a model for disabled children as well as providing teachers with required training. This training would help the teachers to adapt their curriculum content to needs of the students and encourage them to produce required teaching material. (Salamanca Declaration, 2002).

Ahuja (2002) says at the Indian scenario also, there is an increased recognition at present that inclusive schooling is not an alterantive but essential requirement in order to attain universal education for all children. This therefore necessitates teacher training reform to be developed.

**Implications**

Based on the findings of the study there are very clear implications that emerge both for school systems and the family. These are –

- Creating strong parent professional bond by including parents in the program for success of the inclusive program.
- Explicit statement of school philosophy, goals, process of program implementation and communicating the same to the parents.
- Forging linkages between ongoing practices in school and home.
- Teacher training to be an essential requisite for placement of special children in regular class rooms and monitoring systems to be built in to monitor teacher attitude and class room practices.
- Schools to formulate uniform and prescribed evaluation and promotion criteria.
Recommendations

The present study has looked at the special program component in two regular inclusive schools with emphasis on the process/es followed, parental and staff views.
- Forms of effective in-class support.
- Management, role and training of teachers.
- Views of regular teachers in general about adopting inclusive framework.
- Future of special schools.
- Factors affecting parental attitudes.
- Views of pupils with special needs.

REFERENCES


