CHAPTER 3

METHODODOLOGY

This chapter would spell out the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research and also explicate the research design and methodological plan of the undertaken research exercise. The research methods have been carefully sorted by analysing the research questions. There is an array of approaches for conducting research which delve on understanding social phenomenon (Dick 1995; Graziano and Raulin 1993; Patton 1990; Morgan 1983; Burrell and Morgan 1979). Guba and Lincoln (1989) and Burrell and Morgan (1979) both provide frameworks for decision-making for the choice of a methodology. Both concur that explicating ontological and epistemological assumptions are the primary steps in determining the choices available from which to select a methodology for use in inquiry.

Ontology signifies a particular view about social reality which is under study. There could be two possibilities while considering the nature of social reality; objective and subjective. The objective nature of social reality contends that ‘reality’ remains unaffected by the actors, while the subjective nature of social reality signifys that the individual’s mental constructions and their critical engagements with the objects under study impacts the situation being studied. This research considers ‘social reality’ as subjective and getting impacted by the constructions of the social actors thus aligning to the worldview that individuals perceive and construct what the practices and experiences mean for them which accounts for actions and behaviours.

Epistemology relates to how this ‘reality’ can be known. The epistemology is the relationship between the knower and what is sought to be known. Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggested that this relationship depends on acknowledging whether the knowledge is objectively
knowable or subjectively knowable. Guba and Lincoln (1989) asserted that it is “impossible to separate the inquirer from the inquired into” (p.88). Identifying epistemology becomes a vital step towards design of research because of its influence on outcomes of the research (see Kersten & Ison 1994).

On the basis of my assumptions about ontology, epistemology and human nature, I was able to identify the features of a methodology that suited my inquiry. It had to allow me to deal with a social situation in which we as individuals interpret for ourselves the meaning of the experiences that we are having. It would need to allow for participation so that shared interpretations could be developed. The methodology had also to take into account the fact that these interpretations would be emerging as more experience accumulated and that experience would in turn determine the type of experience that followed. It would also need to provide ways of understanding how participants interpret and respond to their experiences. And finally, the methodology would need to provide ways of modifying the world or taking action in it.

In terms of the specifics of my researching the inclusive educational system, the chosen methodology would need to accommodate the fact that the children with disabilities and other stakeholders would be making their own interpretation of their inclusive educational experience and the emergence of new issues as experiences accumulated with these new issues contributing to what would happen as the research progressed.
Table 3.0 illustrates the methodology which would be the bedding rock of the research namely; ontology, epistemology, methods and the logic of inquiry. It would be interesting to first look at the logic of enquiry, which is abductive, “it is sometimes described as involving induction, but this grossly underestimates the complexity of the task involved” (Blaikie 2000:25). The idea of abduction refers to the process used to generate social scientific accounts from social actors’ accounts; for deriving technical concepts and theories from lay concepts and interpretations of social life (ibid: 114). It has vividly surfaced from the literature that “inclusive education” in India is an emerging concept and is understood and practiced differently. In order to study the phenomenon of inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular classrooms in the Indian context, this appeared to be the most promising approach.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Logic of reasoning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Viewing the social reality as the social construction of the participants.</td>
<td>Assumes that people employ interpretive schemes which must be understood, and that the character of the local context must be articulated.</td>
<td>In-depth interviewing will be used to gather information from the child as well as the significant others (parents, teachers, peers). Observation in classrooms would also be employed as a method.</td>
<td>Abductive; describing and understanding the concept of inclusive education as understood by the research participants thereby producing a technical account from lay accounts.</td>
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This was a qualitative study of describing and analyzing the process of educating children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. A qualitative research design was adopted to assist in providing rich ‘context bound’ information (Creswell, 1994), with an underlying belief that
situations are complex and hence must be portrayed from many dimensions rather than focusing on a narrow field (Bogdan & Bilklen, 1992). The intent would be to focus on the participants perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives (Merriam, 1988), with an attempt to understand not one but multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is “bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which regardless of ultimate truth or falsity- become partially self-validating” (Bateson 1972 cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19). The figure 3.1 illustrates the process of research. The start point was drawing up the proposal; formulating the research questions, setting objectives and preparation for entering the field. Thereafter the process involving participation, deliberation and analysis was concurrent which culminated into a research report.

Figure 3.0 The process of research
3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study has been illustrated in figure 3.1. The framework has been derived from the literature review and depicts the lines of enquiry for this research. It centres the child with disability in an inclusive school. As the concept of inclusive education is still evolving in India, there are no set standards for schools. Thus, the schools have both characteristics which may benefit and encourage students with disabilities and ones which may deter their full participation in school proceedings. In an inclusive setting, the child with disability is in constant interaction with his/her typically developing peers without evident disabilities. The framework helps us to understand the promoting factors and barriers as perceived by the child and how inclusive environment as a whole impacts the outcomes of inclusive education.

The research study was conducted in inclusive schools which provide education to children with disabilities. The focus of the study was to study the process of the delivering inclusive education, ascertain the factors promoting inclusive education, determine the challenges and examine the outcomes of inclusive education for children with disabilities. The main stakeholders of educating children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms are the children with disabilities, their families, their typically developing peers in the classrooms, the teachers and the school. The characteristics of these stakeholders would affect the process of inclusive education and the final outcomes. A few of these characteristics might promote inclusive education while others may act as a challenge, for instance positive attitude of the teachers towards children with disabilities might promote inclusion and would have positive outcomes for children with disabilities as well and vice versa. Student characteristics are of
critical importance to the process of inclusion. A study by Singal (2006) highlighted that the Principals of inclusive schools in Delhi garnered a perception that there were “socially accepted” categories of disabilities like, “blindness”, “physical problems” and “mild learning disabilities” are more likely to be included than others. The access and retention in inclusive educational system is affected by factors at all levels of inputs: student, school, family/community and national.

At the school level, there are three major intertwined dimensions of the educational experience, namely school cultures, policies and practices (see Booth & Ainscow, 2002). In the family, the most influential are socio-economic and cultural factors: family economic survival needs, traditional societal attitudes towards disability that may involve shame, guilt, under-expectations, and sheltering/patronization. These factors often combine with distance to school, mobility, school-building accessibility, discrimination, shortage of trained teachers and resource supports to address teachers’ working conditions, and shortage of school resources. A UNESCO report (2001) stated that any parents believe that the irrelevance of the curriculum was one of the reason for not sending the children to school. “They feel the curriculum is not geared to real life, and fruitful years of income generation will be lost even if the child receives only a primary education.” Thus, curriculum development was seen as an important input to the inclusive education.

The teacher characteristics also impact an inclusive setup to a large extent. There have been many studies which have focussed on attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education. Another area of research in inclusive education is the teacher training programmes and their efficacy in dealing with diversity within classrooms. The Teacher Development Initiative in India noted that the gravest concern towards execution of the project was the “attitude of the administrators who have insufficient time and patience to learn and understand its [the programme’s] objective (Jangira& Ahuja 1994:38).
The educational outcomes for children with disabilities in India have remained poor. The illiteracy rates for children with disabilities have remained much higher than general population and school attendance is much lower in comparison to non-disabled children (World Bank 2007). The outcomes of the process of inclusive education are difficult to measure. The student achievement and academic performance are one indicator may or may not been linked to success in adult life. Thus the outcomes will be looked at cumulatively for looking at the success of inclusion. Stubbs (1993) suggested that IE programs look for improvements at all levels: individual, family, community, organization, and government. Specific indicators include: presence, participation, choice, respect, knowledge and skills. Lynch (2001:22) advocated for evaluation of IE programs at all levels (institutional and teacher performance as well as student performance) and against the goals of inclusion within a democratic, human-rights-based environment.
Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

Characteristics of Stakeholders

Children with disabilities
- Type and Severity of Disability
- Learning abilities/IQ
- Gender
- Self Esteem

Family
- Parental attitudes/training
- Household Income
- Economic conditions
- Cultural/religious factors
- Community support

Teachers
- Training
- Attitude
- Belief
- Perceptions

Peers
- Attitude
- Belief
- Perceptions
- Communication
- Support

School
- Core values and ethos
- Curriculum
- Textbooks and learning material
- Teachers qualification

Challenges
- Severity of disability
- Negative Attitude, perceptions of teachers/parent/peers
- Public attitude
- Financial Resources
- Architectural barriers
- Uncooperative peers/teachers/parents

Favourable Factors
- Resources
- Positive Attitudes
- Supportive environment
- Positive Relationships

Process
- Teaching/Learning
- School Environment
- Peer Support
- Parental involvement

Outcomes
- Academic learning
- Good citizenship
- Personal development
- Social and independent living skills
- Formal completion
- Preparation of adult life
3.2 Research Questions

The specification of research questions (i.e., what is to be studied) and research strategy (i.e., how to conduct the study) is an extremely important part of any research project (Yin, 1989:19). Developing the research questions based on my interest and the focus of my research was extremely interesting. The review of literature helped me to formulate my research questions which were relevant to the context and would help in larger goal of knowledge building in the field.

1. What are the components of inclusive education?
2. What are the factors which promote education of children with disabilities in regular educational system?
3. How are the characteristics of the main stakeholders affecting the process of inclusive education?
4. What is the process of inclusive education delivery system?
5. What are the outcomes of educating children with disabilities in regular schools?
6. What are the challenges facing the inclusive educational systems?
7. How these inclusion processes in school could be strengthened?
8. What are the barriers to participation and learning experienced by students?
9. What practices can help to overcome these barriers?
10. To what extent do such practices facilitate improved learning outcomes?
11. How can such practices be encouraged and sustained within schools?

3.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives pursued in order to answer the research questions were:
• To study the profile and characteristics of the main stakeholders in education of children with disabilities in regular schools.

• To explore the process of inclusive education.

• To identify the factors which promote education of children with disabilities in regular schools.

• To ascertain the challenges of educating children with disabilities in regular schools.

• To understand the impact of educating children with disabilities in regular schools.

• To suggest ways to strengthen process of inclusion.

• To document an emerging model for educating children with disabilities in regular classrooms.

3.4 Data Sources and Methods

Qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Denzin, 1989a, 1989b, p. 244; Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p. 33; Flick, 1992, p. 194). The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation (see Flick, 1992, p. 194).

The Table 3.2 illustrates configured data sources and methods for the major research questions. This was prepared by analyzing each research question against the myriad of available research methods. The ontological and epistemological position of the researcher has guided the choice of the research methods. This qualitative study is based on data from
children with disabilities in private inclusive schools in Mumbai, India. I had employed the case study method as it allows an intensive study (Shepard 2003) within its real-life context of children with disabilities. It provides an in-depth and systematic way of looking at events and helps in gaining a sharpened understanding of causality and provides a sound base for extensive exploration in future research (Bent 2006). A total of ten in-depth interviews were conducted from seven inclusive schools in Mumbai. The interviews related to children’s perceptions and experiences regarding themselves and their placement in regular educational settings were noted down. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis. Many researchers have subscribed to audio-taping of interviews in order to avoid bias (Borg & Gall 1989; Silverman 1995). Borg and Gall (1989) suggested that it could prevent unconscious selection of text favouring the bias of the researcher. In this research it particularly helped as the interview span with children lasted more than an hour in most cases and the questions related to the research were interspersed with lot of other information sharing. Children often got distracted if the researcher resorted to note-taking.

The in-depth-interviews were also conducted with the Principals, Regular and Resource teachers and the Parents of the children with disabilities. The interview guides for each of the group helped in intensive probing of the related issues. The concerns raised with the Principals included; What are the basic requirements for an inclusive school, how do the admissions criteria reflect the needs, attributes and diversity of potential students, In what way the school is different from other schools , what were the support systems available for children with disabilities etc. The principals provided information on logistics and administrative issues in an inclusive school. The process related information was mainly sought from the regular and resource teachers. The questions mainly pertained to the process of teaching, collaboration between resource and regular teachers, challenges the teachers face
in dealing with children with disabilities and the advantages of having ‘all’ children in the classroom. The parents essentially highlighted their role and participation in inclusive schools, the challenges they face in education their children in inclusive schools and the advantages they perceive in such schools.

The other methods which were employed were Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) with the regular and teacher trainees. The FGDs conducted with the teacher trainees of a special three-year BA in Integrated Education programme for understanding their perceptions on inclusive education and their anticipatory feelings about support and challenges in the field.

The other themes which were explored were motivation to join the course, their role as integrated teachers, curriculum and reflections about the course. The focus group discussions with the regular teachers encompassed the components of inclusive education, perceived barriers and supports within the school setting, suggestions for overcoming the barriers and what practices could strengthen the process of inclusion.

The FGDs normally lasted for about an hour and there were around 8-10 participants. The FGDs were utilised for exploring the depth and nuances of opinions regarding the issue of inclusive education and understanding differences in perspectives. Apart from this Observation in classrooms where I assumed the role of complete observer; I was uninvolved and detached, and passively recorded behaviour at a distance. Certain observations which were recorded were pedagogy, meeting of physical needs, seating arrangement and place allotted to the child, child’s participation and teacher’s efforts to involve the child. (appendix I may be referred for details)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources and Methods</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the components of inclusive education?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers, Principal/Head of the School</td>
<td>Assuming that it is important to gather information from people who have the responsibility to implement inclusion. The researcher contends that their experience and insight is vital in shaping future educational trends for all students.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary data analysis like literature on curriculum, pedagogy of schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the factors which promote education of children with disabilities in regular educational system?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers, Children with disabilities, Typically developing children, Parents</td>
<td>Interviews with teachers who are the main agents of inclusion would provide their accounts of how they had been handling inclusion/integration of children with disabilities in classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the process of inclusive education delivery system?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with the Principal, Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers</td>
<td>Interviews with children with disabilities and their typically developing peers would reveal their experiences and learning in inclusive/integrated settings and how they negotiate these inclusion experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the outcomes of educating children with disabilities in regular schools?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with the Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers, Children with disabilities, their peers, Parents</td>
<td>Interviews of families of children with disabilities would help the researcher to know about their accounts, reported experiences about the inclusion process.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation in Classrooms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the challenges facing the inclusive educational systems?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with the Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers, Children with disabilities, their peers, Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation in Classrooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How these inclusion processes in school could be strengthened?</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews with the Regular Teachers, Resource Teachers, Children with disabilities, their peers, Parents, teacher trainees</td>
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Focus group Discussions with the Regular teachers, teacher trainees and resource teachers

3.5 Sampling Strategy

The interviews were conducted in seven inclusive schools using theoretical sampling. All these seven schools were private where there was a requirement of monthly fees along with subsidiary expenses on uniforms, books, school activities and transport. They were all mainstream schools with a Resource unit with at least one Resource teacher within campus to assist the children with disabilities. The schools are implementing the “Resource Room Model”. Smith et al. (1993) define ‘resource room model’ as one where the children with disabilities attend resource room for special assistance in deficit areas and spend the rest of the day in general classrooms with their non-disabled peers.

“As no definition of inclusive education exists in India” (Singal 2006), thus the seven schools were chosen based on information from key informants and practitioners/ NGO’s. Those inclusive schools which had at least five children with disabilities on roll were selected for this study. The idea behind this inclusion criterion was to have children with different disabilities being catered to by the school. For instance a school with one child with a locomotor disability would only be dealing with the mobility issues and may/may not have other resources like a resource room or therapy room etc. Another assumption which guided this was that the number of children with disabilities would be scattered in different grades bringing to light issues related to particular classrooms like variation in curriculum, teaching
strategies etc. A number larger than five was being too optimistic as the concept is still new and in its earlier stages of implementation. This also helped in further selection of the students taking into account refusal and non-response. A preliminary enquiry with the schools on the list suggested that none of the state administered inclusive schools in Mumbai had at least 5 children with disabilities hence all seven schools in our study were private schools.

This study was conducted among private schools offering inclusive education, hence the children belonged to high-income families who were able to pay (on an average Rs. 12000/- per annum) for the education of their children. These private schools have monthly fees which makes it inaccessible to few sections of the society, only sometimes a few ‘bright’ children are admitted to these schools as a charitable gesture (Singal and Rouse 2003). For purposes of confidentiality, since the number of children with disabilities in each of the selected schools is very small, the names of the schools have not been disclosed.

Additional information pertaining to the child’s participation was secured from interviews with principals of the seven schools, twenty regular teachers, twelve resource teachers and fifteen of their non-disabled peers. The principal of the school had communicated to the teachers the purpose of our visits to schools and seeking information from them through an internal circular. The researcher had to resort to convenient sampling for the regular teachers. The researcher used to spend time in the ‘staff room’ and those teachers who visited the place during that time and showed willingness to share their experiences were included. Most of the regular teachers agreed for the discussion except a couple of teachers who did not wish to compromise on their free time. Out of the seven schools, six had only one resource teacher.
and they were all included in the study. One school had nine resource teachers and six out of those shared their concerns. The fifteen non-disabled peers were identified by the children themselves as their ‘good friends’ so the researcher explored their attitudes towards their peers with disability.

As teacher training emerged to be an important concept, a perspective from the teacher trainees on the developing field of inclusive education appeared imperative to the research. I therefore, purposefully, organised FGDs with the teacher trainees of the B.A. in Integrated Education, a three-year course. As it is one of few integrated courses run for teacher trainees, it was included in the sample to analyse the inputs given to teachers for handling diversity in classrooms.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was gathered through in-depth interviewing, observation in classrooms and focus group discussions guided by the research objectives. While observation and interviews were conducted hand-in-hand; the observations were carried out in the classrooms and the interviews with teachers were conducted in the staff based on teacher’s availability. FGDs were conducted at a time and place suggested by the participants. Considerable time was spent on rapport building to make the children feel less pressured. A tape recorder was be used with consent and only if the child and other interviewees feel comfortable. The data was collected from July to December 2008 where I spent approximately fifteen working days with each school. The interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide (see appendices) that contained the list of issues and probes were included wherever considered
essential. The questions intended to gain an understanding of how these students viewed their physical, social and psychological self, their abilities, class placement, the legitimacy of inclusive education, and the extent to which they regarded themselves as part of the wide school and community culture and felt accepted by their classmates, friends and teachers.

There were two children who had problems with communication (Sania and Tanmay) and therefore, the interviews were conducted using mothers as proxies. However, the children were present when the interview was conducted. The mothers sporadically made efforts to explain and seek information from the children. There was indeed a concern whether the proxy responses had adequately reflected the views of the children. Though it may be considered as a limitation to the study but there were no better alternatives. As Stancliffe (1999) also stated that a well-informed guess is desirable in cases where the person is unable to communicate his/her own views.

Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the prospective participants. It was also made clear to all participants that there would be no consequences to their schooling or in any other way by not participating, that there was no compulsion to participate and accordingly consent was obtained from both the children and their parents before conducting the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English and Hindi depending on the understanding of the respondents. The interviews conducted in Hindi were later translated by the researcher.

The permissions from the Principals of the schools were obtained with relative ease. However, identifying the children and procuring informed consent from their parents was time consuming and cumbersome. The parents were apprehensive about the interviews,
anticipating the resultant reiteration of the fact that the child had a disability and any negative impact of the questions related to child’s disability. I had sent request letters to thirty parents through their children, twelve of them returned the consent forms with regret note. Ten parents sought clarifications through phone and personal meetings. Eight of them did not respond at all. Thus, the sample comprised children and parents who showed interest in the research and provided written consent to be interviewed in the school.

This study focuses on two key areas; i. the child’s understanding of self and, ii. children’s comprehensive experience of inclusive environment. Both areas govern their participation in inclusive schools and the development of their individuality, and the process of inclusive education delivery system. The perspectives of the teacher trainees and practitioners in the field were also incorporated to enrich the data. The data obtained from multiple sources was combined to prepare case studies. Cross-case comparisons resulted in common themes. Atlas-ti (qualitative data analysis software) was used for analysis.

All interview transcripts were analysed to identify emerging themes and on what Miller (2000) (quoted in Welsh, 2002) terms as ‘organising’ the data, which was done by coding the text and breaking it down into more manageable texts. A code-book which included a detailed description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and in a few cases exemplars of real text for each theme (MacQueen et al., 1998) was maintained and used actively. For the observation data, the field notes were scrutinized for recurring themes and were matched with those themes emerging from the interviews. The data generated from FGDs was analysed to identify key themes that emerged from the discussion. Where possible, quotes that represent key points have been provided to illustrate meaning. Then the themes were connected to existing theories to evolve a model of inclusive education in India.
During the process of analysis, the main themes which emerged coincided with the earlier conceptualisation. The findings are discussed within the theme of support systems within inclusive schools, the challenges faced by the children with disabilities, the process of inclusive education and the outcomes of educating children with disabilities in inclusive schools. The themes are not exclusive of each other and there are areas of overlap. However each segment has brought out significant findings which were integrated in the final chapter.