

UNIT IV: NETWORKING FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILY

Involving parents and the community is an important principle of quality, both in and out of the classroom. It is even more relevant in the case of inclusive education, which is much broader than formal education and should not only take place within the four walls of a classroom. Parents' collaboration is not only of benefit for children: there are also possible gains for all parties, for instance:

- ✓ Parents increase interaction with their children, become more responsive and sensitive to their needs and more confident in their parenting skills.
- ✓ Educators acquire a better understanding of families' culture and diversity, feel more comfortable at work and improve their morale.
- ✓ Schools, by involving parents and the community, tend to establish better reputations in the community.

Creating a climate and sustaining a culture of collaboration is a challenge for schools. But it is one that pays large dividends through time. However, the recognition that family engagement in education benefits children does not make clear how the involvement becomes a positive force.

The first step for families to become involved in a collaborative way with schools is to promote a social and educational atmosphere where parents and partners feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard and needed. Cultural factors and traditions strongly influence the relationship between schools and the community. In many places throughout the globe, schools are the centre of community life and are used to encourage and achieve social participation. Such cultural environments will ease the process: parents, schools and community leaders know how to work together and find creative solutions for improving learning, responding to economic crisis and disease outbreaks, or assisting populations affected by disasters caused by natural hazards.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP WITH PEER GROUPS

Inclusive schools promote respectful and supportive relationships, avoid the bullying epidemic, and build the attributes of positive peer-to-peer interactions. Due to the current state of our national economy and shrinking education budgets, schools and businesses alike are striving for both efficient and effective ways to maximize resources. One very powerful resource that is often over-looked, underutilized and perhaps not well understood is literally right in front of us: peers supports

Peer support is a strategy that involves placing students in pairs or in small groups to participate in learning activities that support academic instruction and social skills. This instructional approach does not require additional staff or extra funding. It is a research-based methodology that yields positive results related to student achievement and a sense of “belonging” over the course of time. Peer supports provide teachers with a learning tool to enhance instruction for students with and without disabilities.

The following are three innovative ways that peer supports can be used to meet the instructional and social needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting. However, each of these models require upfront planning that includes selecting the right type of strategy, utilizing it at the right time with perhaps individualized outcomes all aligned with the lesson goals.

- Collaborative Learning – An instructional strategy used to reinforce skills taught by the teacher. This teaching method allows time for practice, review, and opportunities for students to use higher-level thinking skills.
- Cross-Age Peer Support is another strategy that assists with the learning in the general education setting. This approach typically involves older students, usually high school age, who provide instructional support for elementary or secondary students.
- Peer modeling is another support that can be used to help students learn academic, processes and classroom routines. It also provides the classroom teacher opportunities to use peers to assist with instruction, clarifying directions and give social reminders with little or no disruption to the lesson cycle. It is an excellent way for peers to provide

appropriate behavioral models of students who need to improve their social skills.

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING AND TEAM

What Is Collaborative Team Teaching?

Collaborative team teaching often occurs in inclusion classrooms. (Read about the benefits of inclusion classrooms.) In a co-taught class, general education and special education teachers work together to plan lessons, teach, monitor student progress and manage the class.

It's an approach that makes it easier to teach all students the same content and hold them to the same educational standards. That includes kids with learning and attention issues who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans.

The Benefits of Co-Taught Classrooms

Being in a co-taught classroom has many benefits. Students can spend more time with the teachers and get more individual attention. And with more than one teacher, it's easier to teach students in smaller groups or one-on-one.

Students have the opportunity to learn from two teachers who may have different teaching styles, ideas, perspectives and experience. It also makes it easier to implement differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and personalized learning.

How Co-Teaching Works

Here are the basic models of co-teaching:

1. **Team teaching.** Both teachers plan lessons and work together to teach students. This helps students see the teachers as equals with each other. It also gives students the chance to ask questions and get assistance during a lesson. This can be especially helpful for students with accommodations.
2. **One teaches, one assists and/or observes.** Having one teacher actively teaching frees up the other teacher to assist and give individual help as needed. Or the other teacher can observe. For instance, an observing teacher may collect information about how a child responds to different teaching approaches and about his

attention and behavior. That kind of data is valuable for IEPs and for behavior intervention plans.

3. **Station teaching.** Teachers may be responsible for different parts of the lesson plan. This allows them to play to their teaching strengths. Students are divided into groups and move from one station to the other. Or the teachers rotate from group to group.
4. **Parallel teaching.** The class is split in half, and each teacher takes one group. Both groups are taught the same thing but in a different way.
5. **Alternative teaching.** One teacher handles a larger group of students. Meanwhile, the other teacher works with a small group on a different lesson or gives more support to struggling learners.

MOBILISING SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The following community resources which are easily available need to be mobilized for ensuring inclusive education:

1. Neighbourhood Schools itself: Most of schools imparting elementary education are established by community itself with grant-in-aid from Government, local authorities of district administration. Over the years, in most countries, localization as well as privatization of elementary education is taking place. Thus most elementary schools are managed by community groups, parents groups, local NGOs or school management committees. Thus community should be motivated, convinced and motivated to ensure access of children with visual impairment to such schools. The right approach in regard may be sharing successful examples of inclusion and performance of such children in inclusive set up in nearby schools. Efforts should also be made to get the appropriate guidelines in respect of enrollment, provision of services and extending support services issued from the State Education Authorities.
2. Peer Group: In most developing countries, parents survive on daily wage work, agriculture or associated activities. Thus, they find it difficult to take the child to the school on their own. A sibling or

student from the neighbourhood should be convinced to guide the child for going to and returning from the school. Such buddy system helps the child while at school as well. It has been found that it is easy mobilize such human resources in the rural areas.

3. **Class Teachers:** Many teachers are also willing to take an additional responsibility of learning Braille, using assistive devices and understanding specific need of such children provided they are sensitized, imparted a short training and motivated properly in this regard. It is important understand that apart from teaching Pre-Braille, mobility, Braille or use of education devices which are taught by a special educator, the class teacher has also an important role to play. These roles include seating arrangement, direction of light in case of low vision children, speaking the text that is being written on black board, using alternative methods of evaluation, permitting use of Braille writing devices etc. Thus seeking involvement and participation of class teacher is of utmost importance.
4. **Family Members as Readers:** Involvement of mother, other family members of sibling in respect of reading books, assisting in recording, understanding of Braille and use of educational and mobility devices is very important. While most program focus on the child and her specific needs and do not realize and appreciate importance of involvement of such human resources in educational support activities at home of the child. Such human resources which are available at the home in the community of the child must be identified, sensitized and motivated to support such the child.
5. **Child Preparatory Services:** Many countries now have facilities for play groups, pre-school child preparatory services, Montessori classes, kinder-garden for "seeing" children. The concerned authorities should be motivated to extent such facilities to children with visual impairment as well. Inclusion must start at pre-school level and such service providers should be motivated to establish such facilities for such children as well. It would however require support of Special Educators in respect of meeting specific needs of such children.
6. **Low Vision Assessment Services:** Most developing countries have a vast network of ophthalmic clinics, vision centres and eye hospitals.

These entities confine their services to eye health or ophthalmic care and do not extend services of vision assessment, low vision care, provision of low vision device and vision stimulation. The ophthalmic and optician fraternity should be motivated to include and provide these services to children with visual impairment as well. A large of children with low vision, those with galloping myopia and such eye ailment will benefit from these services.

7. Financial Resources: The concept of charity in most developing countries gives the impression that each and every expense on education, books, educational material, school fees etc. should be provided by State or NGOs promoting such education. It is however essential to convince parents and family members to support education of a child with visual impairment like they do in case of a seeing child. They should be motivated to consider education of children at par and extend financial support in case of education of such a child. They should also be informed and enabled to avail scholarships and other concessions and benefits available in case of education of such a child.
8. School Uniform, Boarding & Lodging etc.: Very essence of inclusive education is that the child with visual impairment stays with family like any other child and avails all the facilities at home like any other family member. This results into a significant contribution by the family members which in case of residential education is incurred by State or schools itself. The parents should be motivated to extend all facilities of uniform, school meals, transport and educational material as they do in case of their seeing children.
9. School Facilities: Once such a child is in school, she is entitled to get all the benefits of mid-day meal, educational material at concessional rates and seek exemption from school fee available to other non-affording students as per school norms. Many countries in the developing world provides elementary education free-of-cost and extend other support. In this way, child with visual impairment shall be entitled to all facilities available to seeing children and special facilities available to children like herself.
10. Special Educational and Mobility Devices: In many countries, such devices are available either free of cost or at affordable cost,

subject to income level of parents. The parents must avail of these schemes and enable the child to get all the devices. Similarly, many NGO, INGOs and local authorities provide Braille books, low vision devices and audio books either free of cost or at affordable cost. The school authorities and parents should be shared this information and should be enabled to avail these benefits.

11. Support of Service Clubs: Many service clubs like Lions Clubs, Rotary Club, Round Table and Inner Wheel and many country specific clubs have taken initiatives on supporting such education. The Lions Clubs in many countries has established Braille production units, low vision clinics and ophthalmic support units. The parents and members of community should be guided and enabled to avail support from such initiatives.
12. Travel: Many countries provide special concessions to all children for the purpose to travelling to school in public transport. Whereas children with visual impairment are provided free transport. Once child joins an inclusive school, she would be eligible to avail either concessional or free travel in the public transport thus make her education more affordable.
13. Educational Loans: In many countries, the National Governments have launched schemes for providing educational loans at very low rate of interest to students who wish to pursue higher or professional education. The authorities promoting education of children with visual impairment need to persuade such agencies to provide such loans or micro credit to such students at par or at favourable terms and conditions.

Thus there are huge community resources which already exist or could be made available easily to support inclusive education of children with visual impairment. The point however remains as to who would identify and establish such resources and enable individuals, parents and family members to avail these resources. I leave it to prudence to participants to debate and work out a country or region specific mechanism in this regard. This is to reiterate that by mobilizing these community resources, it would certainly be possible to make inclusive education more effective, affordable and

result oriented. Let us put all our efforts in the direct direction and in the right manner with the single objective of holding each child with visual impairment with hand and leading her to the school – and thus leading her to life.

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