ORIGINAL ARTICLE

'A Study of the Best Practices Implemented in Colleges of Education for Catering to Diverse Learner needs'

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Abstract:

Ever since education has been declared human rights and it is the responsibility of all the educational institutions to see that the teachers cater to the diverse needs of the students, so as to help them to realize their potential to the fullest and the onus is on the teacher education institutions to develop the needed competencies, skills and attitude necessary for inclusive practices.

Present teacher education institutions face various challenges with respect to linguistic, academic, regional, physically challenged students etc. Many education colleges offer a multiculturalism or diverse learner's course to prepare teachers for today's classrooms.

Most diverse learning needs can be met in the general classroom when two guidelines are kept in mind by the classroom teacher: (1) Student performance is the result of interaction between the student and the instructional environment and (2) teachers can reasonably accommodate most student needs after analyzing student learning needs and the demands of the instructional environment. In fact, the adaptations made for a specific student's learning needs may be beneficial to many other students in the same classroom. Adaptations are simply good teaching techniques put to use.

Students are diverse in their needs and interest. To assure that all students have the opportunity to reach their potential, every effort must be made to meet these unique needs and foster individual interest. As a teacher educator it is our responsibility to provide positive learning environment in which all students have the opportunity to experience success. The present paper is an empirical study of few aided and unaided teacher education institutions about their strategies adopted by them for catering the diverse needs of the learners.

When we recognise the diversity of the learners in our classrooms and provide for their diverse learning needs in our planning, we differentiate the curriculum. (Braggett,1997)

INTRODUCTION:

Inclusive schooling is the practice of including everyone – irrespective of talent, disability, socio-economic background, or cultural origin – in supportive mainstream school and classrooms where the needs of all students are met.

LBP

'Inclusive Education is defined as a learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning styles and language.' [NCSNET/ NCESS 1998]

One of the major features that will characterize classrooms of the new century is learner diversity. This will be a notable advance from past practices and indicates an awareness of the important role inclusive education has to play in the future.

In order to give all learners access to quality education, a dramatic shift from exclusivity to inclusivity is required.

UNESCO's action in the field of inclusive education has been set explicitly within the 'inclusive education' framework adopted at the Salamanca Conference:

"... Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions." (Article 3, Salamanca Framework for Action)

"Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system." (Article 2, Salamanca Statement)

All human beings are unique. We all have a different pace of learning, some learning faster than others, which may result from students' ability to discern what they are supposed to notice. Learning must always have an object, we cannot simply learn without learning something. Identifying that 'something' and how students make sense of it—i.e. "object of learning", is a prerequisite for planning a lesson. However, the object of learning for any particular lesson is not prescribed in the curriculum, it can only be identified through the interaction of students with the subject topic. Teachers need to focus on how students communicate with the subject in order to identify a worthwhile object of learning. But students are not blank sheets; they have their own preconceptions in coming to the object of learning. Sometimes their intuitive understandings may hinder them learning new things. Students really are unique; it is quite possible for a class of 40 students to have a diverse range of understandings regarding a particular object of learning. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the ways students' understand the object of learning and from that starting point identify the critical features students must grasp in order to fully understand the object of learning (Lo, Pong & Chik, in press).

The purpose of having inclusive education is to value children with special needs so they can participate equally in all educational activities alongside their peers without special needs. There should not be any discrimination, segregation or isolation of these children with special needs from being educated rather they must be given an equal opportunity to participate alongside children without special needs.

In Inclusive Education we strive to adapt the environment, our attitudes, the curriculum and teaching methods in such a way that both the external and internal barriers to learning can be minimized. The present paper is an empirical study of few aided and unaided teacher education institutions about their strategies adopted by them for catering the diverse needs of the learners.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

With contemporary classrooms becoming increasingly diverse, educational authorities, teachers and school administrators are looking to teaching and learning strategies that cater for a variety of learning profiles. As a response, differentiated instruction is a paradigm, which is gaining ground in many educational circles.

When proper arrangements are present, inclusion works for all students with and without disabilities in terms of mutually held positive attitudes, gains in academic and social skills, and preparation for living in the community. With appropriate guidance and direction from adults inclusion helps to develop friendship and positive peer interaction. Students learn to be sensitive to understand, respect and grow comfortable with individual differences and similarities among their peers.

Apart from positive attitudes, researches have repeatedly shown the tremendous benefits that children gain from socialization with their peers during the school years. Children learn many academic skills as well as daily life, communication, and social skills (Cullinan, Sabornie, and Crossland 1992)

Students are diverse in their needs and interest. To assure that all students have the opportunity to reach their potential, every effort must be made to meet these unique needs and foster individual interest. As a teacher educator it is our responsibility to provide positive learning environment in which all students have the opportunity to experience success. Inclusion education makes good social sense. Segregation teaches children to be fearful, ignorant and breeds prejudice.

Differentiated Curriculum refers to teaching that is adapted to take into account the individual differences and needs of students in any one classroom. It comprises modifications to the curriculum,

teaching structures, and teaching practices in combination to ensure that instruction is relevant, flexible and responsive, leading to successful achievement and the development of students as self-regulated learners.

The increasing academic diversity in Indian schools, compels educators and educational authorities to reconsider teaching and learning in the regular classroom. Looking at the present situation the students are committing suicides for various reasons. It appears to us that all learners are finding it very difficult to manage the tensions of 21st Century. It is imperative for teachers to embrace the diversity, and cultivate learning environments that support nurturing, thriving and enjoyable classrooms. This change must support all students, the intention being to sustain life-long learning in heterogeneous classrooms. With this respect investigators think that it is a high time to make the psychological principle that every person is unique and we should design programmes to empower the students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.To study how far Principals' as leaders of teacher education programs take care to develop programs to help all learners to be competent.
2.To study how far their philosophical bases, psychological beliefs place role in their decision making with respect to various educational programs.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION:

Diverse Learners: Teaching students with learning disabilities requires teachers to alter the rate and manner in which they present and develop the material. By using new scientific terms in the context of an activity and reapplying the terms in different experiences in subsequent activities, students develop a deep understanding of the term and a scientific perspective.

Best Practices: The most effective and efficient method of achieving educational objectives or completing educational task. Here we consider that this task will be efficient only if it takes care of uniqueness of all human beings that directly or indirectly concern with its impact. What constitutes best practice can be determined through a process of benchmarking. An educational institution can move toward achieving best practice, either across the whole institution or a class in particular, through continuous improvement. In educational institutions, we need to empower every learner to become world-class entrepreneur in the enterprise of education. Principal's role in creating best practices to be a culture of an institution is the need of the hour.

METHOD:

In the present study, analysis of the responses of the Principals' to the semi structured interview was done.

Sample:

The samples of the study were 6 principals of aided and unaided colleges in Mumbai.

Tools of the study:

The tool used in the study was semi-structured interview scale consisting of 10 interview questions.

CONCLUSION:

The following best practices are getting implemented by the institutions in the area of teaching-learning and evaluation.

1.Using Constructivist , collaborative and Co-operative approach
2.The duration of the B.Ed. Course should be extended
3.Various workshops like stress management, time management , personality development
4.Various curriculum transactional methodologies like seminars, buzz sessions, panel discussions , brainstorming etc must be employed
5.Developing students' thinking through activity based learning, participative learning , co-operative learning
6.Conflicts on the basis of religion, etc must be resolved through counseling sessions by giving personal

care and taking criticism positively. Remedies should be provided on an individual basis.

7.Discussing students grievances /issues in open forums

8.Implementation of a sound system of justice and discipline

9.Students of varying physical , academic , social , economic abilities are encouraged to set and achieve targets as per their capabilities

10.The vernacular medium students are provided the facility of undergoing the English speaking course so they feel competent enough in communicating confidently in English

11.Proctorial and tutorial systems provide individual counseling to maximize their potentials

12.Theory sessions are conducted in English and in the vernacular (Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati) mediums to ensure all students are active learners

13.As in the University examinations, all the questions of tests and term end examinations are provided in all the languages.

14.Through the teaching of topics like learning disabilities – dyslexia, dysgraphia , discalculia , autism etc and educational visits to give practical exposure to such cases.

15.Making heterogeneous groups for co-operative learning

16.Involving students in community work ,projects for visually challenged

17.Organizing visits to special schools, institutions that house people with special needs, etc so that students develop feelings of empathy and concern for them.

As the education system is at the beginning of an inclusive paradigm, there can be no doubt that a non-segregated, anti-discriminatory environment for a diverse population of children and young people in schools will produce schools which are more sensitive and more people-orientated. It will also produce a younger generation that is more tolerant and accepting of difference.

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