Inclusive Education

Pedagogic Issues and Problematic Teaching-Learning

--The Case of Gender, Tribal, Dalit, Economically Weak and Differently-abled

India International Centre (Annexe)

Nov 9, 2013

The Presentation was organised by Deshkal Society on the thematic of *pedagogic issues and problematic teaching-learning practices in schools*. Issues as gender, tribal, dalit, economically weaker and differently-abled sections of the society, and how they impact teaching-learning were deliberated onNov. 9 at India International Centre, New Delhi. The Presentation was kept short, sharp and crisp.

A select few educationists and experts were invited from diverse streams, skills and expertise. It was attended, amongst others, by Dr. Peggy Mohan, teacher, linguist, author and producer children's TV programs; Dr.Srinivas Rao, specialist in teaching and research methodologies, diversity, equity, access, and excellence in education; Mr.Vikas Gupta, educationist and one of the initiators of alternative People's Charter on Education; Dr.SaumenChattopadhyaya, specialist on human capital, education, and specific features of the education market;Dr.ArvindMishra, expert on early education, literacy and collective violence, teaching social psychology at Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, JNU;Dr.DhirJhingran, Educationist, Policy maker and former IAS officer; Mr. Ravi Prakash, Programme Manager in PACS education and development practitioner; Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of Deshkal Society; and Mr. Narendra, field researcher on adivasi and learning processes.

Initiating the session Dr.Sudhirendra Sharma, moderator, elucidated the theme and scope of Presentation. He suggested speakers to suggest tools for new engagements for Deshkal Society's new engagement on education for children of marginalised communities in Bihar. Based on experience, studies and observations on government primary schools and classrooms there is ample evidence to suggest that the school curriculum, teaching-learning practices and processes are not sensitive towards addressing the learning needs and concerns of children from socially excluded communities. Prejudices and discriminatory practices against these children still operate in school practices and processes. Immediate remedial steps are needed. He reminded the participants to be brief and focussed in their presentations.

Beginning the Presentations Mr Sanjay Kumarshared Deshkal Society's consistent engagement with developing a programme on Social Diversity, Inclusive Classroom and Primary Education in India for

a decade. This pilot initiative to build and broaden the perspectives, policies and practices on inclusive primary education through teacher-training, advocacy and consultative processes for making the schools and classroom practices inclusive and friendly to children, especially from socially excluded communities is an outcome of a process of that programme. The insights into three critical issues on inclusive education developed through our work over the period, which still need to be addressed, are: Problematic teaching-learning practices; Hidden curriculum and pedagogic violence, and Subjective interpretation of universal and parochial principles.

The proposed plan aims at collaborating and developing creative engagement with State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) and Bihar Education Project (BEP) for the state level activities, mainly in the state level stakeholder's workshop, and dissemination of the perspective paper and the resource materials on inclusive primary education. Similarly, we also propose to collaborate with DIETs/PTECs and BRCs at district and block levels respectively for the consultative workshop and dissemination of the perspective paper and the resource materials. It goes without saying, your presentations and discussion from a multidisciplinary perspective will enrich the debate on inclusive education as well as will provide inputs for development of our perspective paper on Inclusive Education.

In her presentation Dr. Peggy Mohanobserved the schools as a monolithic structure, un-integrated into society or community. She cautioned against the hidden violence for children from economically weaker sections. Their classroom needs are not addressed by teachers. Children are thrown into an unhelpful environment and expected to function on own. Neither are inputs provided nor concepts clarified in ways and contexts the child can identify with. Such children remain academically poor though socially they may fare better. Also, when a child is admitted at 3 years of age, he/she is expected to begin learning English without realising at that age the child doesn't understand his/her own mother tongue. A child is ready to learn a language not before 10 years of age. Learning a language involves sophisticated thought processes. It is a traumatic phase for the 3 year old. Learning in one's own language develops confidence and abilities. Bright children are turned dull and leaden. It is a long period of muteness and non-reaction for the child. It is a violation of the child's rights. Not only are the modes of teaching not child friendly even the language used in text books is unfriendly.

Dr.Srinivas Rao began with the need to explore the word 'inclusiveness'. He began with asking what terms as 'inclusive education policies and programs' mean. They probably mean that someone is trying to bring in something new. But Inspite of those children keep dropping out. Disengagement continues unabated; such high proportion of children do not desire to be part of learning process provided them. They stop feeling the need for education and remain unequal members of society. Some social groups have remained outside education systems. Historically, social structures discouraged education for them.

Given their trainings, teachers are only redressal mechanisms; educationally, they are supposed to be child-centric. Teachers are trained, at most, to empathise with marginalised children and not engage them that tantamounts to, not inclusion, but exclusion of the child. Text books are standardised which makes them exclusive. They have lost touch with social realities of class, caste and gender. They remain only transactions in terms of examinations. A standard III text book recounts how an 'untouchable' child studied with Gandhi ji in schools. At that age the child is unable to grasp he/she is untouchable. Inclusive education processes ought to help a child identify his/her social location and begin ways of negotiating it.

Mr. Vikas Gupta first clarified that it is not the universal principle of equality as such which poses restrictions on adopting specific measures or providing individualized attention for hitherto excluded groups essential for inclusive education. On the contrary, this principle fully recognises the phenomenon of difference, otherwise it would have always been irrelevant. For various reasons, inclusion ideology is an important corrective, however, it also appears that the idea of inclusion has become more attractive these days, because, as distinct from the ideologies that laid core emphasis on the doctrine of equality, it does not pose the same degree of challenge of equitable redistributive justice in such explicit terms. It is far less marked by the tension of redistribution on equal basis between excluded and included; between privileged and disprivileged; and between 'haves' and 'haves not'. Inclusion of some marginalized or hitherto excluded groups and peoples may be allowed without equitable and democratic redistribution of means, fruits and opportunities: without substantially redrawing the balance of existing class formation and power relations in favour of actual majority. He therefore suggested that we need to bring the issues of equitable quality, structural parity and state's direct responsibility at the core of the discourse on inclusive education going beyond the contemporary focus on mere inclusionism and access within a 'minimalist' framework and increasingly stratified educational apparatus. Secondly he said that education is never a value neutral enterprise. Therefore, there is no reason to afraid if one proposes to make education commensurate with the needs and values of the larger society by allowing their lived experiences their valid place in the learning process. However, it does not happen, because the larger society—comprised of various kinds of excluded groups/communities forming actual majority—as a pedagogic resource is hitherto left outside the formal educational sphere. One of the major hindrances to inclusiveness is that educational curriculum, processes and practises do not allow for the child's lived experiences to become part of his/her pedagogic exercise. This hinders the child in raising questions about his/her social exploitation. It is imperative to bring values and skills of socially exploited/excluded groups at the heart of educational practice and discourse in order to make education truly inclusive. Isolating education from the real life situation would continue to perpetuate marginalisation of the child and his/her social background. It is also imperative to keep in focus factors that cause social and cultural marginalisation. Regrettably, the focus in the dominant policy framework and the resultant practices

has been on numbers and expansion and not education as such. Therefore, children from marginalised communities' find themselves on the margins of teaching-learning processes, and lose interest in processes and practises apparently provided for them. The irrelevance of, and gradual alienation from, the system adversely impacts them. Despite the recommendations of expert educational bodies, the official policy does not aim at ensuring individualized attention of teachers to each kind of differently endowed children. The consequence is alienation, high rate of absenteeism, and dropout-ism. On one hand this kind of structure of schooling discourages children from marginalised sections forming majority of our population, on the other it does not facilitate teachers to attain objectives of inclusive education by providing individualized attention to each children as envisaged for instance by NCERT Focussed Group Discussion Paper on Teacher Education (2005) and ignored by SSA and RTE Act and other official policies. One of the historical reasons of this situation is that the development of education in India is different from countries that provide this model. We have never tried to build a system of education which ensures the attainment of 'equality, quality and quantity' objectives all together realizing their essential complementarity. In this scenario, it is not a surprise that there are no reasonable efforts to build a system of inclusive education that can meet the individualized requirements of children with physical and mental disabilities or any particular excluded group. Hence, whilst envisioning inclusive education and seeking its materialization, three principles should be kept at the core. These are equality of participation, equitable quality of education and pedagogic engagement with the lived experiences of learners within formal education.

Dr.Arvind Mishra pointed out that the roots of divisiveness in society lie as much in the discipline of Psychology. Education borrows heavily from Psychology. It creates a rift between the child and his/her environment from the very beginning. Psychology is heavily divorced from everyday living realities. E.g. the reality of child's everyday life is that he/she acts in collectivity and sharing. Psychology insists he/she is an autonomous individual, and not part of the given socio-cultural milieu. This creates dilemmas and confuses the child; eventually excluding him/her from everyday life activity. Psychology is based on the 'Model of Deficit'. It is assumed children are deficit and when they are unable to solve a problem, the standardised onslaught on him/her begins and prevents integration into school system. Dr Mishra asked what the primary purpose is when a child joins school. Doe he/she know what he/she is supposed to do? He may or may not identify with the performance goal. Children are different but are expected to adhere to same standard of achievement. The situation is compounded by the teacher's roles of educationists having been reduced to that of a clerk. Not only are children marginalised, teachers are marginalised as much. The buzzword is not Dr.

DhirJhingan observed that equitable learning is a good starting point for a discussion with teachers and teacher educators rather than beliefs and attitudes about discrimination in the classroom. Pre-service training is an ideal time to work with young teachers around issues of diversity and inclusion in the

classroom. It is important to ensure that teachers develop an understanding of practices that can involve and engage children as active learners. For ensuring that all students can learn to read well in early grades, it is possible to promote teaching-learning strategies that provide opportunities for scaffolding, regular practice and revision and extra attention for struggling readers. Learning skills and 'deep comprehension' need to be stressed instead of mere repetition and memorization. The entry point for such discussion with teachers is 'good teaching-learning' strategies and not issues of bias or discrimination. This is more likely to succeed. It is important for teachers to recognize that children have different learning needs and some differentiated instruction is needed in every classroom.

Dr.SoumenChattopadhya pointed out that village hierarchies are reflected in schools. It is the teachers' role to mitigate them. They need be imparted special counselling and training.

Retention or dropout-ism in schools pertains mostly to children from economically weaker sections. Push and pull factorsof economy impact these sections the most. It is they that influenceretention ordropout rates in schools. The quantity of schooling is closely related to economic growth or its failures. Wide differences exist between growth rates and the levels of household poverty. In this context it is pertinent to assess the efficacy of development schemes for school education, retention and drop out.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Sudhirendar Sharma.