
UNIT 9 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SIGNIFICANCE AND PRACTICE

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Whether a child receives early intervention in a centre-based setting or through home-based services, it is a family centered service. Until three years of age, the child is totally with the family. When the child is over three years of age, parents begin to think of sending her to a preschool or an early childhood centre on a daily basis. They would expect their children to begin going to a primary school by the time they are five or six. Of course, some children may enter the preschool later and take longer to complete preschool education and enter the primary education system later. However, many children will begin to move out of their home to receive education, from three or four years of age.

The child has to be helped to make the transition from the home to the early intervention centre/preschool and then to the primary school. Equally, the school has to be made ready to receive the child.

In this Unit, we will learn about how to prepare the child for preschool centre/primary school and how to prepare the centre/school for the child. By preparing the centre/school for the child, we mean how to create inclusive centres, preschools and primary schools so that as far as possible, education is provided in inclusive settings from the earliest years.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- state the readiness skills the child needs to develop in order to be ready to attend school;
- describe the steps that need to be undertaken to prepare the school to include the child;
- explain the features of an inclusive center/school;
- state the concept of ‘whole school approach’ for inclusion and universal design of learning;
- describe the roles played by different team members in the process of inclusion; and
- state the significance of parent professional partnership in making inclusion a success.

9.2 PREPARING THE CHILD FOR THE SCHOOL

9.2.1 Transition from Home to the Preschool / Primary School

Let us now consider the **changes that any child – with or without disability – needs to be prepared for, when she makes the transition** from the home to the preschool/primary school or from preschool to the primary school.

- 1) As a preparation for attending a preschool or a primary school, **the child has to learn to follow a routine**. She has to be helped to understand that activities will occur in a certain sequence in the school. This routine may be less structured in a preschool compared to a primary school, but there will be some routine and structure when compared to home environment.
- 2) The working hours of a preschool are shorter than the primary school. Therefore, **the child has to be prepared for attending longer hours**. If the child has never been to a preschool, the primary school would be her first experience of a structured rule-bound environment – she needs to be prepared for that.
- 3) When the child moves from the home to the preschool, she needs to be **emotionally prepared to be away from the mother/caregiver**. **The preschool is** an unfamiliar environment and she needs to adjust to that. In a preschool, the child will be a part of a group. Though the child may get one-to-one teaching, for many activities the children will be grouped. **The child has to get used to sharing the attention of the adult with other children**.
- 4) The transition from the preschool to the primary school also requires some preparation on part of the child. The preschool is a protected environment for the child as compared to the primary school. In a primary school, there will be a larger number of children under each teacher. **The child would need to adjust to the new environment with many children and a new teacher**.

- 5) If the children in the primary school have not been sensitized, they may bully or ridicule the child with disability. Since the public sphere is insensitive to children with disability, parents may hesitate to send the child to the primary school. **The parents, as well as the child need emotional support, till the child gets adjusted in the school.**

9.2.2 Readiness Skills for Transition

After understanding the changes that will come about in the child's routine when the child joins the preschool or moves from the preschool to primary school, **the next step is to help the child to develop readiness skills. Readiness skills are those skills which prepare the child for attending school and enable her to participate effectively.** What are readiness skills? Some of these are as follows:

- 1) **The child needs to be toilet-trained** so that she can manage herself in the hours outside the home. Even if the child needs help in using the toilet, **she needs to be taught to indicate her need well in advance.** This will be particularly required when the child moves to the primary school as there would be no specific caregiver, to take care of the child's personal needs, as there would be in a preschool.
- 2) Some children may have difficulty with bowel or bladder control, because of which **they may be using diapers.** The teacher has to be made aware of this. In this case, **the emphasis would not be first on toilet training the child, but on equipping the helpers and teachers in the school to ensure that the child remains comfortable during the school hours.** This may involve changing of diapers. The responsibility of toilet training may be an objective for later days.
- 3) The child has to learn to **self-feed.** The child may be using adapted aids and may need to sit in specific positions that will enable self-feeding. The teacher must be aware of this.
- 4) **Some children may not be able to eat by themselves.** In these cases, suitable arrangements need to be made in the preschool/primary school.
- 5) Some children may need to use **assistive devices** or support in moving around. The teacher and the helper will need to be trained to help the child with this.
- 6) The child may need to **develop attention** by focusing in an activity staying in one place, so that she can attend to the activities being done in the school. The teacher needs to understand that she needs time to achieve this and suitably adapt her interaction with the child.
- 7) **If the child shows any difficult behaviour, she has to be helped to change this.** If the child shows socially acceptable behaviour, she is more likely to be accepted in the school by the teachers and the children.
- 8) When the child moves from the home to the preschool, she has to be **emotionally prepared to be away from the mother/caregiver.**
- 9) When she moves from the preschool to the primary school, she has to be

prepared to move from a protected environment to **an environment which expects the child to function more independently**. For example, taking care of her belongings such as bag, water bottle, waiting for her turn and so on.

The transition for the child from the home to the preschool and from the preschool to the primary school can be made smooth if the **parents, preschool and primary school teacher are in contact with each other at least three months** before the child is expected to join the preschool/primary school. It helps to visit the school, observe the routine there and talk to teachers, if possible, regarding specific arrangements that may be required.

Attending a preschool or an *anganwadi* centre, prior to joining a primary school helps the child with readiness skills. The educator at the preschool centre makes efforts to help the child acquire daily living skills as well as develop important concepts. However, the role of the parents is crucial. They have to continue the training provided in the preschool. In case the child has not been able to attend a preschool, the entire responsibility for making the child ready for school falls upon the parents. **It is ideal if the parents, the community worker and the preschool teacher work together to help the child develop readiness skills.**

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) What readiness skills does the child need to develop as a preparation for joining the preschool/primary school?
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- 2) How will the school experience be different for a young child with disability?
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9.3 PREPARING THE SCHOOL FOR THE CHILD

With education in the 6-14 years age group having become a fundamental right through the RTE Act in 2009, the country has to provide facilities for primary education to all children. **Further in 2016, when the Rights to Persons with Disability was enacted, it included inclusive education as a legal right of the person for the first time. This is a big achievement as it means that it becomes the right of the person with disability to study in a regular school with all children.**

While education below six years is not a fundamental right, we know that care, stimulation and education in these years are of critical significance for any child, including children with disabilities. Education, whether during preschool years or primary school years, should ideally be provided in an inclusive set-up.



Studying in an inclusive set-up

You have read that the child has to be helped to make the transition from the home or the preschool to the primary school. Equally, the centre/ school has to be made ready to receive the child. In this Section we will read how to do so.

9.3.1 Admission Does Not Mean Inclusion

You know that the earlier the child with a disability starts attending the school with children without disability, the better it is for the child's development and learning. But this is possible only when inclusion takes place in the real sense of the word. In many cases, it has been seen that **though children with disabilities attend the same school as the children without disability, they are not involved in the activities of the regular class and the school.** Though they may seem to be included, in reality they are isolated within the school.

The following example brings this out. The child is enrolled with the school, but neither the teachers nor the children have accepted her, and no adaptation has been made to meet her unique needs. **Thus, the school experience does not become meaningful for the child.**

Example 1

Mohita belongs to the lower socio economic class. She was born with very thin and weak legs. She had learnt to walk late and had a poor body balance. As a result, she joined a school near her house when she was much older. She and her younger sibling would go to school together. Mohita reported that her friends would often tease her because of her jerky movements. The teachers were also not sensitive to her needs. They would ask her to sit back in the class during the sports, dance and music periods. In fact the teachers would tell her not to come to school when the preparations for Annual Day or Sports Day were going on in the school.

One day, as the bell rang and children were heading home, Mohita fell down and hurt herself. Her class teacher rushed to help her but scolded her saying, “Could you not wait? You should leave at the end. Why are you in a hurry to run?” When she asked her friend to help her pick her bag, she got the response, “My mother says that one who cannot lift her bag can do nothing in life.”

Mohita later told her mother that these words hurt her more than her bruises. After this episode, Mohita refused to go back to her school. Her parents went to meet the principal to discuss the matter. However, the principal expressed his concern stating that it was not a school for children like Mohita. He asked the parents to stop sending Mohita to school as there were health hazards for her that he could not take care of. Mohita had to stay home, while her younger brother continued to attend the school. Her parents tried to admit her in other schools, but could not.

The parents then came across an NGO working for inclusive education. They took Mohita for a visit to this school. The first thing she saw in the school was children with physical disabilities playing cricket. Mohita really liked the school and wanted to join it. After an assessment, the doctor prescribed special shoes for Mohita. The teachers were sensitive to the needs of students and the peers were supportive. The school had a number of cultural and sports activities for all children. Mohita was happy to be in the new school.

What can be done to make inclusion a reality? Changes are needed at many levels. But before we read about that, let us understand the meaning of an inclusive school in the context of children with disabilities.

9.3.2 What is an Inclusive Centre/School?

An Inclusive Centre/School

- 1) includes all children, irrespective of their abilities and learning needs**
- 2) provides learning opportunities for children according to their needs**
- 3) is designed to take into account the wide diversity of student characteristics and needs.**

Let us understand each of the points above.

Point 1 means that an inclusive school welcomes a mixed or **heterogeneous** group of learners and is based on the principle of **zero rejection**. Heterogeneous group of learners means children of different abilities, race, economic situation, gender, culture language or religious belief. **Zero rejection policy is one in which no child is denied a place at school on the basis of any such differences.** All children are admitted in the school.

Points 2 and 3 mean that the school environment makes changes and adapts itself to respond to the needs of children with diverse needs. It also ensures that children are taught in an environment that is best suited to their learning needs.

The inclusive centre therefore **is one that not only ensures the presence and acceptance of diverse learners; but also creates conditions for**

participation and performance by all children. It is important to understand that an inclusive centre is clearly different from an integrated centre. The **inclusive centre** emphasizes the changes in the system to enhance student participation, while the **integrated centre** focuses on the child to adjust to the system. Let us read the following real life example for clarity.

Example 2

Radha is a girl diagnosed to be having cerebral palsy. She got admission in a regular school in Class I. It was the initiative of the school principal who had brought in policy changes to give admission to all children, irrespective of their learning needs. Radha had been attending a special school before this. She uses a wheel chair and could not climb the school stairs. The principal, therefore, discussed this with the class teacher and shifted her class to the ground floor. The process of installing a lift was also initiated simultaneously. The seating plan of the class was changed to enable Radha to participate in the class activities. Radha could push her wheel chair up to the toilet but needed support for shifting herself from the wheel chair to the toilet seat to use the toilet. A support rod was installed in the toilet to enable her to use the toilet independently. During the class, she took a lot of time to copy her work from the blackboard and sometimes missed out on information. The teacher gave this responsibility to the fellow students. Anyone who completed their work first was given the responsibility of copying the work in Radha's notebook. Radha had to check if the work had been correctly copied or not. Radha needed additional help in following instructions and understanding concepts. The teacher, therefore, after explaining a concept on the board, would sit with Radha to help her understand the concept, while the other children completed the task she had given them.

Gradually, Radha's participation in class activities improved. However, she would stay back in class during the dance and sports period. The class teacher encouraged her to go for these classes by going along with her. She discussed the possibility of involving Radha in the dance class with the dance teacher. The dance teacher, inspired by the class teacher, gave her a prominent role in one of the items being prepared for the class assembly. Radha liked her role, went for the dance class regularly and performed on the stage along with her peers. The sports teacher also got ideas from this inclusion and tried to plan some games in a way that Radha could also participate.

Do you think this case study denotes inclusion or integration? Give reasons for your answer.

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Yes, it denotes inclusion because **the school changed to adapt itself to the unique needs of the child instead of expecting the child to ‘fit’ into the existing school structures.** The school changed in the following ways.

- The admission policy was changed to enroll all children whatever be their learning needs and abilities.
- Shifting the classroom from the first floor to the ground floor, adapting the toilet and installing a lift were the physical changes done in the school so that Radha’s needs could be met.
- The teacher took the responsibility of ensuring that Radha was included in all activities and that she understood and participated in what was happening in the class by involving the other children in helping Radha and by giving her individualized attention within the class.
- She served as a role model to the dance teacher and the sports teacher who also changed their strategies.

We can summarize that preparing the school for the child means

- bringing about attitudinal changes among the principal, teachers and children without disability (social environment);
- implementing curriculum adaptations; reflecting on the teaching methodology to be followed; developing individualized teaching-learning strategies and materials, as per children’s need (teaching-learning environment);
- bringing about necessary changes in the physical infrastructure of the school (physical environment).

In other words, **preparing the school for the child means adapting the social environment, the teaching-learning environment and the physical environment.**

We have discussed attitudes and social environment in Block 1 of this Course. You will further read about the details regarding teaching-learning strategies that are useful for children with disabilities as well as the curriculum for ECSE that will foster children’s development in the early years in the Disability Specific Block, Block 3. In this Unit, we will briefly discuss the features of an inclusive teaching-learning environment.

9.3.3 Inclusive Teaching-Learning Environment – Universal Design for Learning

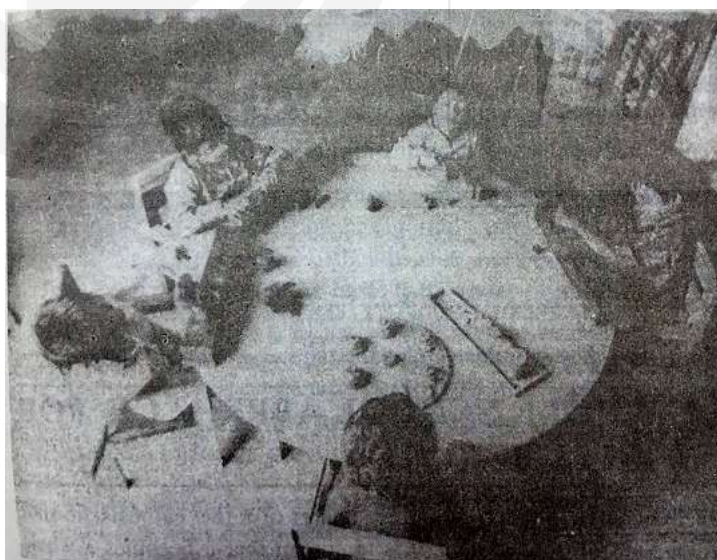
The children coming to a centre or preschool have varying levels of abilities and knowledge, based on their previous experience. The role of the school and teachers is to provide equal (optimal) opportunities for learning. What does equality of learning opportunities mean? It does not mean treating everyone the same. Equality of learning opportunity means that the teacher

- understands that all children can learn.
- is willing to provide support as per individual needs.
- has the ‘know-how’ and the skill to implement teaching-learning strategies that will ensure participation and achievement by all.

When the teacher makes a conscious and deliberate effort to ensure each student's participation in the teaching-learning process, we can say that she is putting into practice the **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**. This means planning and implementation of activities and lessons in a way that allows all students to participate in knowledge construction at their own pace. This is possible when the learning environment is flexible and responsive to each student's needs and abilities. The learning environment includes the teaching strategies and the teaching-learning materials. This is called 'universal design' because, the adaptation that the teacher makes for the sake of one student who has diverse learning need in the class may result in benefitting 'all children' in class too. For example, if the teacher adapts the lesson on 'community helpers' by bringing a post man/police officer/doctor and allowing them to interact in class for explaining the concept to a child who has intellectual disability, all children in the class will benefit.

The following are some teaching strategies that a teacher can use with children when putting into practice the Universal Design for Learning. You can choose strategies that are appropriate for a child and adapt them to each child's needs:

- multi-sensory teaching
- task analysis
- demonstration-prompt-practice
- reflective teaching
- differentiated teaching
- shaping
- chaining



Activities for children at an inclusive centre

A point that we want to emphasize here is this: **Do not wait to acquire information about teaching strategies and universal design for learning before you begin to adapt your teaching for the individual child's needs.** A sensitive and concerned educator observes children, learns from their responses and adapts her teaching style for the different children, even if she

does not have formal knowledge about the child’s disability and teaching strategies. A desire to help the child, a confidence in one’s ability and a little creativity, can go a long way in helping the teacher make her teaching style appropriate to the child’s needs.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) What is an inclusive school?

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2) What is zero-rejection policy?

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3) What is meant by Universal Design of Learning?

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4) If you were working in a preschool, what changes will you make to welcome a child with disability in your school?

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9.4 WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH FOR INCLUSION

Inclusion can be initiated with the support of a few enthusiastic staff members but for it to sustain, it is important that it becomes a **whole school approach**. Whole school approach means that all the school personnel — teaching and non-teaching staff — believe in inclusion as ‘possible and beneficial for all’ and implement the required changes.

For inclusion to be successful in a centre/preschool /primary school, there should be:

- clearly defined and manageable roles for all people.
- opportunities to share and collaborate to find strategies for meeting the varied needs of the students.
- necessary support systems in place; for e.g. specialist teachers to support regular teachers.
- recognition and reinforcement of efforts to ensure continued motivation of the staff.
- provision of financial resources.

Inclusive practice does not always mean provision of expensive facilities. Inclusion can be practised by creating low-cost indigenous support mechanisms within the school. Also it is not a one-time effort of making provisions for students with disabilities. Instead it is an ongoing process of managing different barriers that may come up during different phases.

In the following sections, we will specifically discuss the role of the principal, the regular teacher and the special teacher in creating an inclusive centre.

9.4.1 What the Principal Should Do

- 1) **The most important attitude is that education in an inclusive environment is a right of children with diverse learning needs.** This must be accepted by the heads of schools, the management and the staff. It should not be seen as a favour or a concession to the child with disability. Only when all the teachers of the regular schools believe in this philosophy, will they be truly able to include children with disabilities in their classrooms.
- 2) The principals need to **overcome their own apprehensions if any**, as well as those of their colleagues regarding enrolling children with disabilities in their school. For this, they need to make sure that **the teachers understand the basic facts about disabilities** and their impact on the child. They need to understand that children with disability are ‘children’ first and have much in common with children without disability. **Principals do not have to be disability experts but they must have the knowledge and skills that will help them to establish inclusive practices in their school.**
- 3) **Making the staff aware of the needs, rights and capabilities of children with disabilities** could be done **through awareness- raising programmes.** During these sessions the staff concerns, apprehensions and queries regarding teaching children with disabilities in the general classrooms could be discussed.
- 4) Having promoted the vision/philosophy of inclusive education among the school staff and initiated attitudinal change, **the principals have to ensure that ‘inclusive practices’ are followed in the school.** For this, the principal needs to ensure that **all members of the school have the necessary resources and support to practice inclusion. Creating a culture of inclusion involves:**
 - a) **Providing professional development opportunities and training to the staff. For example, equipping the teachers with strategies that will help them to adapt and modify the curriculum and teaching-learning methodology** as well as assessment strategy, in order to meet the needs of all children.
 - b) **Creating a collaborative culture**, where teachers and special educators work towards common goals and both groups have a sense of shared responsibility for the children. This can be achieved when special educators and general classroom teachers plan the educational programme together for the child and interact on a regular basis.

- 5) To enable inclusive education to become a reality, the principal has to also **provide manageable schedules, time-tables and flexibility to the teachers**. The principals need to develop a feeling amongst the class teachers that **good teaching addresses ALL children**. Good teaching means bringing out the best and developing the potential of all children, including the child with disability. It means addressing the needs of the individual child. To be able to do this, the teachers will have to adapt the teaching strategies, methods and materials to the needs of each child, whether the child has disability or not. When working with children with disabilities the adaptation has to be done more systematically.
- 6) They must encourage the parents of the children with disabilities to participate and interact with school staff. Relevant information must be shared with parents regularly.
- 7) The principals have to **ensure that the physical environment of the school is accessible to the children with disabilities**. Thus, in the case of the children who use a wheelchair, it would be desirable to have classes on the ground floor and if it is feasible, to construct ramps to enable them to go to the higher floors. Similarly, having the class of the child who is not fully toilet-trained closer to the toilet and providing necessary physical support is helpful in giving her the required training.
- 8) They need to **organize advocacy and awareness programmes for the people in their local area**, to overcome the negative attitudes towards disability.
- 9) They need to **organize parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings**, which will encourage all parents to interact with each other. It is also advisable to meet parents in smaller groups and have selected problems for discussion. During PTA meetings, misconceptions regarding disabilities can be clarified and other issues can be discussed. Many parents of children without disability are hesitant to let their child study with children who have a disability. Educating such parents about the advantages of inclusive education is essential. This can happen only when the parents meet regularly and discuss these issues with each other.

Usually, the principal or head of the school sets the tone of the school. Therefore, if the principal is supportive and positive towards children with disabilities, the quality of educational services for the children with disability in the school will definitely improve. **In fact, programmes for children with disability have succeeded wherever the support of the head of the school is positive and constructive.**

9.4.2 What the Regular Teacher Should Do

As mentioned earlier, a negative attitude is the foremost barrier to inclusion. **The teachers' response towards the child will influence the attitude of the other children.**

Regular teachers often feel unprepared when faced with the challenge of teaching children with disabilities. Often, this is due to lack of information regarding disability and how they can organize teaching-learning experiences for the child.

The following are some specific strategies that the teachers need to adopt to facilitate inclusion:

- 1) **The teacher needs to be updated regarding her knowledge about disability, inclusion and current trends and developments, and be competent on how to make modifications and adaptations in the teaching methodology.** This will help the teacher to feel more prepared about working with children.
- 2) **The teacher needs to sensitize the children without disability about children with disabilities.** For example, she should help the children without disability to understand that an activity may have to be broken down into many simpler steps before the child with disability can learn to do it. This breaking up may not be required for them and they should not ridicule any child who takes longer for the same activity. To take another example, they must help the children without disability understand that some children with disability may drool. When they understand this, they will not ridicule the child. The following two pictures show some sensitization activities being carried out with children without disability. These help them to understand and be sensitive towards the experiences of people with disabilities.



Sensitization activities: A child without disability attempts to paint using a head pointer



Sensitization activities: A child without disability is pushing another child over an obstruction. This gives him the experience of pushing a wheelchair over obstacles

- 3) **Consult the special educator/ resource teacher to plan educational strategies and curriculum adaptations in keeping with the child's needs.**
- 4) Be confident about their teaching.
- 5) The teacher needs to **promote peer tutoring** for enriching the educational experiences of the children. Remember, children do not naturally have inhibitions and hence giving them opportunities to interact with the child having a special learning need will help them understand each other better. As far as possible, provide opportunities in natural environments such as lunch time, indoor and outdoor play and other informal circumstances. Peer tutoring on the other hand, is a carefully planned pairing of a child with special needs with one who does not have a special need for specific activity. This should be done with careful planning.
- 6) **The teacher needs to structure the physical environment of the classroom so that it enhances learning by the child with a disability.** For example, the chairs and desks should be so arranged such that a wheelchair can pass through easily. If the child needs a special seat to sit, it should be organized. The following two pictures show how the classroom environment has been structured to meet the needs of children with cerebral palsy by using adapted tables and chairs, as well as by providing enough space between the furniture to move around easily with the help of assistive devices. In the first picture the table, which is

blue in colour, has been adapted by adjusting its height to suit the child so that she can easily use her arm for writing and other activities. The corners of the table all around are raised, so as to prevent the materials from falling off. The second picture shows a wedge placed on the table to facilitate reading and writing.



(a)



(b)

Adapting the classroom environment to suit the needs of children with disabilities

- 7) **The teacher must encourage the parents to participate in the child's learning** by carrying out at home, the activities that have been done in the school. The parents may need to be taught specific methods by the teacher.
- 8) **They need to develop positive attitudes in the parents** of children without disability towards children with disability.

The following is an account of the experience of a regular teacher after she implemented inclusive practices in her class.

Example 3

Neha is a preschool teacher and has children in the age group 4+ in her class. During the past two years, she has worked in an inclusive classroom

where there are four students with disabilities. For one hour a day, a special education teacher, Vinita, works in Neha's classroom as a co-teacher. Each week, they discuss each child's education plan and review the progress of these students. This is what Neha had to say to her fellow teacher:

“Don't worry that you have to know everything about all disabilities in order to be successful as a teacher. I have realized that children with disabilities are just like other students in my class. Many of their needs are the same as that of other children. Many of the teaching strategies that I use for them are the same for all the other students in the class. I just have to keep in mind their specific needs and make modifications and accommodations – just as I do for other children without disability in the class, from time to time.”

9.4.3 What the Special Teacher Should Do

Special/resource teachers are those who have undergone training in working with children with disabilities. They provide guidance and support to the regular teacher to teach children with disabilities by adapting the curriculum, teaching strategies and learning materials. When required, the special teacher herself may teach the children with disabilities or demonstrate to the teacher how to teach a particular concept.

The special teacher can:

- 1) Facilitate the process of inclusion of the child in the regular school. This would include identifying a school near the child's home and interacting with the school authorities to enroll the child and to bring about necessary alterations in the school.
- 2) Help in planning the child's individualized education programme in consultation with the regular teacher.
- 3) Suggest changes in the classroom environment.
- 4) Suggest modifications in the curriculum (including syllabus, teaching methods and materials).
- 5) Train the other staff members of the school, depending on the school's needs.

9.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF PARENT PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The child's first teachers are her parents. Parents can help their young child feel loved, competent, and better able to cope with the challenges in life. However, parents do need help and guidance to know *what* specific activities they should carry out, as well as *how* they should carry them out. For this, parents and family members need the advice and support of the early intervention team members. **These professionals not only provide direct training to the child, but also explain to the parents the activities that they should carry out with the child at home. The success of any early intervention programme depends upon what the parents and other family members are able to do, to facilitate the growth and development of the young child with disability.**

As the child grows, her needs vary. The **parents must meet the experts periodically to report on progress or problems and get further support.** Therefore, regular consultation is essential. Coordination between parents and professionals is essential for early intervention to be successful.

9.5.1 Barriers in Communication

Sometimes there may be a barrier in communication between the parents and the teachers/professionals as each is unable to understand the other or is unaware of the point of view of the other. Both mean to help the child but because of lack of understanding the situation from each other's point of view, each may think that the other is uninterested, demanding or lazy.

The following situations depict some barriers. Let us understand the barriers in parent-teacher collaboration through a few real examples.

- A teacher in an inclusive private school described the mother of a five-year-old student with Down's syndrome as *"Dominating. She tries to dictate teachers about what should be done in class, without realizing whether I will be able to do in a class of 25 students"*
- Another teacher of the same school found the parent *never comes for the meetings and never checks diaries. "No one in the family helps the child with the homework. The mother has another child to take care of and does not bother about this special child, thinking that the girl is going to a regular school and so all is well."*
- A teacher of a government school stated, *"Parents often admit their children with disability to the school and then relax as if their duty is over."* Another teacher also expressed similar concern stating, *"We have some parents who are educated and understand, but others don't. They neither help children practice at home nor come to school to seek teacher's advice. They expect teachers to do their best but they won't help the child themselves"*
- One teacher, on telling the father to help the child at home, received the following response, *"Madam, you are the teacher and know what has to be done. I am not that educated."* The teacher laughed and pointed out that the parents were not expected to teach but to see that their children do their home work. According to her, it was difficult to put across this message.

Now let us see what the parents had to say in each of the above cases:

- The mother was dissatisfied with the teaching methods being used by the teachers with her son at the school. She voiced the need for trained teachers who would know how to deal with a child with special needs.
- The parent expressed her inability to spare time as per the given schedule of meetings by the school, after the birth of the second child. However, she was concerned for her daughter and expected the school to provide expert inputs for her child. The mother said: *"I have been requesting the school to hire a special educator for my child to compensate for my inability to spare extra time. I am willing to pay an extra fee, but the school does not have plans to have one of their own."*

- Parents were thankful that the school had opened doors for their children. But they did not meet the teachers frequently, out of fear of being labeled as interfering or demanding. Both the parents were working and could not always take leave to meet the teacher at the assigned time.
- The parent in this case shared a feeling of helplessness and complete dependence on the teacher as can be interpreted from his statement. He stated, *“It is enough that my son has been able to go to school. I do not know how intelligent he is. I am not that educated and I am afraid that I would be made fun of in school.”*

If we compare the responses of teachers and parents, we can see that each has been unable to fully understand the position and the viewpoint of the other. There is a lack of empathy towards the other person’s situation. Each is blaming the other, whereas both need to work in close co-ordination to help the child realize her potential. The key is to develop a sense of trust, share a sense of respect and communicate frequently regarding the child’s progress. This not only enhances parents’ confidence but also an understanding of how to assist. The following steps can help to develop a better understanding between two vital pillars of the child’s life — the teacher in the school and the parents at home.

- 1) **Be aware of the diverse backgrounds from which the children belong – they belong to families with different income levels, cultural practices, language and social backgrounds.** This will help you to understand each child and connect with the family, instead of seeing the child and the family in terms of stereotypes.
- 2) Give **clear and consistent messages** to the parents regarding their child’s abilities in different areas of development. Use everyday language and avoid technical terms.
- 3) **Be flexible and considerate** in planning the schedule of meetings with parents.
- 4) **Demonstrate interest** in inputs provided by the parents and encourage their participation in school.

These simple steps would go a long way in preserving the home-school partnership.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) State three steps that school principals can take to ensure an inclusive environment for children with disabilities?

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2) How can the regular teacher help children with disabilities to perform well in the classroom?

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3) How can parents ensure that their child is benefiting from an inclusive environment at school?

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9.6 SUMMING UP

- Preparing the child for the school means orienting the child as well as parents to the changes the child will experience in the transition from the home to the preschool or from preschool to primary school.
- Preparing the school for the child requires orienting the school principal and school management, teachers, children without disability, their parents and the community.
- Inclusive education focuses on providing effective education to diverse learners, irrespective of their abilities, economic situation or gender.
- The most important step in developing an inclusive environment is to have a belief that inclusion is possible and beneficial for all.
- The physical environment of the schools and classrooms should be designed as per the principles of Universal Design for a barrier free environment.
- Equality of learning opportunities should be promoted by use of Universal Design of Learning. Provision of such a flexible and responsive learning environment encourages the student to learn at their own pace.
- Parent-teacher cordiality plays a significant role in the child's progress and can be developed by creating a sense of trust, sharing a sense of respect and frequent communication.
- Inclusion is a continuous process of identification and management of barriers within the existing system which may come up from time to time.

9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) When the child moves from the home to the preschool, she has to:
 - be emotionally prepared to be away from the mother
 - reduce or change any difficult behaviour she has
 - learn to sit at one place for some time and pay attention to the activity in the class
 - learn to eat by herself as much as possible
 - go to the toilet independently or ask for help.
- 2) The preschool experience will be different for the child in the following ways:
 - If the children without disability are not sensitized, they may ridicule the child.
 - The parents, as well as the child need emotional support, till the child gets adjusted in the school, as this is a new experience for the child as well as the parents.
 - She may need more help in feeding and toileting as compared to children without disability.
 - The child may need support in moving around.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) An inclusive school
 - includes all children, irrespective of their abilities and learning needs
 - provides learning opportunities for all children according to their needs
 - is designed to take into account the wide diversity of student characteristics and needs
- 2) Zero rejection policy is one in which no child is denied a place at school on the basis of differences such as gender, caste, disability, poverty, academic levels and so on. All children are admitted in the school on an equal basis.
- 3) Universal design of learning means, planning and implementing activities and lessons in a way that allow all students to participate in knowledge construction at their own pace.
- 4) I will need to make changes in the physical, social and learning environment in the following ways:
 - bringing about attitudinal changes among the principal, teachers and children without disability; (social environment)
 - implementing curriculum adaptations; reflecting on the teaching methodology to be followed; developing individualized teaching-

learning strategies and materials, as per children's need; (teaching-learning environment)

- bringing about necessary changes in the physical infrastructure of the school (physical environment)

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1)
 - School Principals need to change their own attitudes and influence the attitudes of their teachers to believe that all children, including children with disabilities can study in their school.
 - The principals need to provide for professional development opportunities for their staff.
 - The principals will need to provide manageable schedules, timetables and flexibility to teachers.
- 2) The following steps taken by the regular school teacher will help children with disabilities in their classrooms:
 - increase her knowledge about disability how to make modifications and adaptations in the teaching methodology
 - sensitize the children without disability about children with disabilities
 - consult the special educator/ resource teacher to plan educational strategies and curriculum adaptations
 - promote peer tutoring
 - structure the physical environment of the classroom so that it enhances learning
- 3)
 - Parents must meet the experts periodically to report progress or problems
 - Share the success and achievements that the child experiences at home with the school teacher
 - Share fears and doubts about their child's future with the teacher and ask for information
 - Seek information about the manner in which they can help the child at home to learn better.