

INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LEARNERS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

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Abstract

Education has to be child centered and for that pedagogical issue have to be analyzed in the context of Learners' background, their needs, abilities and strengths. Therefore, it particularly becomes more pertinent to have a thorough understanding of Learners with diverse needs. It further assumes significance in the context of RPWD Act 2016 and NEP 2020 besides the early initiatives for Inclusive Education, after 3 international conferences organized at Jometin, Thailand (1990), Salamanca (1994) and Dakar, Senegal (2000). Therefore, pedagogical considerations should be viewed from the perspective of learners with multicultural backgrounds, gifted and creative learners, and those with special abilities, such as children with sensory disorders (including visual impairment and hearing loss), children with behavioral disorders, children with speech and language (communication) disorders, intellectually challenged children, children with physical and health problems, and children with learning disabilities. Keeping into consideration the present paper focuses on pedagogical considerations, for Learners with Diverse Needs, which have to be contextual and resource specific and Learners centric and the teachers have to overcome the numerous challenges including attitudinal accessibility related and resources related barriers apart from other problems. It calls for reconsideration of Teacher Education Programmes both at Pre-Service and In-Services and compliance of provisions of RPWD Act-2016 and NEP 2020 to ensure successful and effective functioning of Inclusive education settings.

KEY WORDS: INNOVATIVE, PEDAGOGICAL, CONSIDERATIONS, LEARNERS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS

Introduction:

The term pedagogy comes from the Greek word 'Pedagogia,' which means "to lead the child". Latin derived word Pedagogy Education refers to entire process of learning, instructions and operations actually performed. Pedagogy is considered as science or theory of education whereas Andragogy is related to the art/science of teaching adults. Further, pedagogy is considered as process of providing knowledge and development of skills and also involves different strategies of instructions or styles. Thus, before focusing on innovative pedagogical considerations for learners with diverse needs, it becomes pertinent and essential to give a brief account of learners with diverse needs as it will be beneficial and relevant for students, young scholars, and all those who have a keen interest for the cause of learners with diverse needs or learners with disabilities. In this context, the real challenge before teachers is as to how to respond to varying educational needs of all children with diverse backgrounds, being the issues of individual differences pertinent one because no two individuals are alike; even two identical twins are also not same. If we observe the students in the playground or classroom, we can see a spectacle of this uniqueness. But differences observed in the playground are more obvious than those we may study inside the classrooms. The uniqueness of children matters a lot when it comes to their learning in school and successful functioning in society. Variations among children are multifaceted of different varying dimensions like vision, hearing, mobility, communication, Intelligence, social and emotional aspects. Children vary on each dimension, but if such variations vary to that extent or degree which requires adaptation in on-going school programmes/provisions/services then it becomes an issue of concern to teachers from the point of view of children with special needs/inclusive education/inclusive classrooms/learners with diverse needs. Here it is pertinent to highlight that serious efforts/initiatives for inclusive education were started from 1990 onwards when "World Conference on Education for All", was organized in Thailand (at Jomtien) in 1990. Thereafter in 1994 there was a "World Conference on Special Needs Education", in Spain (at Salamanca). In year 2000, "Dakar Conference", was held in Senegal. In the context of inclusive education, important issue of concern of teachers is also regarding deviations among children as there are positive deviations, negative deviations, multiple deviations, and combination of these may include positive and negative deviations, and negative and negative deviations and multiple deviations. A brief description of these terms is as under:

Deviation: It stands for a process or quality and the characteristics of deviating, differing or going away from something that is supposed to be fixed or decided.

Positive Deviation: Deviation in greater degree on the positive side in comparison to the norms among the population of their age or grade peers is referred as positive deviation.

Negative Deviation: Deviation or who drift along the negative side of one's growth & development. These children lag behind in comparison to the peers of their age and grade.

Multiple Deviation: Child shows a complex blend of either +ve, -ve or a mixture of both deviations simultaneously at one or other period of his life. Examples of these are Gifted and Creative children (positive + positive deviations), these may be Gifted or Creative children but may be having a particular disability. They are considered to be having positive (+) & (-) negative deviations, if there are children who are mentally as well as physically challenged, they are considered to be having negative (-) & (-) negative deviation. On the basis of deviations or background/variations of learners, they can be classified from the point of view of their variations into the following categories:

I. Children with Multicultural Heritage:

Children with multicultural heritages are those whose customs, values and traditions set them apart from their peers and gender in their acceptance. Although they do not require special educational provisions but teachers' concern/consideration in this regard. Children with multicultural heritages (inherited) differ in terms of race, beliefs, social institutions, culture as their customs, values and traditions are different from their peers and therefore the same hinder in their acceptance. Although they do not require any adaptation in regular school programmes, but have implications for teachers' concerns from the point of view of cooperation of peers with those students in the context of their adjustment.

II. Gifted and Creative Children:

Gifted and Talented Children are very bright and require special teaching pedagogical consideration and enrichment of curriculum. They learn quickly and excel in all areas. Some are creative and have talents in poetry, music, literature and sports etc. and in case of those who are scholastically gifted acceleration, and enrichment of the curriculum is suggested for them. Here teachers' role has to be different/contextual corresponding to the learners' strengths and limitations in particular, because of their special talents—intellectual or creative.

III. Disabled Children:

Here it is pertinent to clarify that there have been three terms which were being used interchangeably viz. disabilities, handicapped and impairment.

• **Disability:** is an inability to do something, a diminished capacity to perform in a special way, is a physical state or condition that results in an impairment of functioning (seeing, hearing and walking), a disable can become a handicap.

• **Handicap:** On the other handicap is a disadvantage imposed upon an individual. Handicap is a disability that interferes with an individual's ability to function in a specific situation. A disable may/may not be a handicap depending on the circumstances. Likewise, a handicap may/may not be caused by a disability.

• **Impairment:** is often used as a synonym for disability. Although the term refers technically to diseased or defective tissue. e.g. Loss of leg (Disability). If classes are on 1st floor (Handicap). Impairment (e.g. Muscular Dystrophy). Also, a disability may pose a handicap in one environment but not in another. e.g. A child with an artificial leg may be handicapped on a Badminton/ Basketball court but may not experience handicap in the classroom.

Under this category, there are different types of disabled children, from amongst those the most commonly known as those with sensory impairments-visually impaired/challenged and hearing impaired; children with behavioral disorder; children with speech and language disorder; mentally challenged children; children with physical and health problems, and learners with disabilities.

Description of the aforesaid types of disabled children is being highlighted in the following sequential order:

Children with Sensory Disorder

(a) Visually challenged

Vision: Normal visual activity is measured by how accurately a person can see a symbol or letter at 20 feet, thus normal vision is 20/20.

A score of 20/20 means that a person, being tested, can see at 20 feet distance what a person with normal vision can see a distances of 40 feet. The distance from 20 feet is used as at this distance when light rays enter the eye no accommodation is required of the eye to focus the rays; the eye is at rest. People with visual acuity measured between 20/10 and 20/200 in better eyes with corrections are considered to have low vision. Visual acuity below 20/200 classifies a person as legally blind.

(b) Hearing impaired

➤ A person with normal hearing will hear sounds between 0 dB - 20 dB and have no difficulty in hearing. Hearing impaired children have varying range of hearing loss viz.

➤ **Slight 20-40 dB**

➤ **Mild 40-60 dB**

➤ **Moderate 60-75dB**

➤ **Severe 75-90 dB**

➤ **Profound 90 dB and above**

In case of profound hearing loss an individual do not hear sounds quieter than 90dB and therefore is not able to hear conversation and cannot develop language. Only sign language can be used in such cases. Such individuals are required to be placed in special class or special school for deaf.

Children with Behavioral Disorder

For such categories of children it is not easy to define this dimension since behavioral or emotional disturbance is not quantifiable unlike other disabilities. Schizophrenic or Autistic children are the examples in this problem range. These children have certain characteristics which adversely affect their performance in education also which includes:

I. An inability to learn which is not due to the problems related to factors of intellectual, sensory or health aspects.

II. Problems of interpersonal relationship related to teachers and their classmates.

III. Behavioral problems or feelings during normal situations.

IV. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears related to self or problems related to schools.

Under this category cases of social maladjustment are not covered unless and until they are seriously emotionally disturbed.

Children with Speech and Language (Communication) Disorders

Communication disorders are impairments in articulation, language, voice or fluency. Speech is abnormal when it deviates to such an extent as compared to other individuals and interferes while communicating which results in distress to both speaker and listener. Some common speech disorders are disarticulation, voice disorder and stuttering.

Intellectually Challenged Children

Such category of children has low intellectual functioning resulting in problem related to adaptive behavior. This category of children have different range of their I.Q viz. I. Q. range of Mild is 50-55 to 70, those of Moderate 35-40 to 50-55, and of Severe cases below 35 (Grossman).

Children with Physical and Health Problem

This include orthopedically impaired or chronically ill and they may be from very heterogenic conditions but can be broadly grouped under two categories-

☐ **Physical Disabilities** which are orthopedic impairments and referred to condition of muscular or skeletal system (May be requiring brushes and Wheel Chair).

☐ **Health Impairments** which are related to a condition that require ongoing medical attention due to chronicle illness conditions which call for medication or hospitalization, for instance, the children having asthmatic, heart problems, diabetic or thalassemia, and children with learning disabilities (having dyslexia, disgraphia, & discalculia) are covered under this category.

Children with Learning Disabilities

In case of learning disability, the children of this category have no problem related to vision, hearing and their intelligence is also normal but the problem lies with the perception, organization and interpretation of information in the brain. The perceptual motor problem is quite frequent with such children. The area of learning disability is newer. Learning disabilities may be developmental or academic.

• Developmental learning disabilities include attention disorder, memory disorder, perceptual motor disorders, thinking and language disorder.

• Academic learning disabilities often associated with developmental learning disabilities related to reading, spelling and writing/handwriting and calculations.

These terms are related to learning disability:

Dyslexia: It is related to serious reading problem wherein the learners/students have problem in identifying words or understanding what they read. They tend to experience numbers, letter, words and sound reversals.

Dysgraphia: It is a neurological disorder of written expression that impairs writing ability- spelling legibility, words spacing and sizing. People with dysgraphia may write more slowly than others.

Dyscalculia: Is a mathematical learning disability that impairs an individual's ability to learn numbers related concepts, calculation. It is also called 'Numbers Dyslexia' or 'Math Dyslexia'.

Innovative Pedagogical Considerations for Upliftment of Learners with Diverse Needs

The aforesaid description of learners with diverse needs including those with different types of disabilities and has direct bearing in the context of pedagogical considerations on the part of teachers of Inclusive Settings and so far as issue of innovative pedagogy / pedagogies is concerned, it does not mean that there is always a need of innovative or new pedagogy for the learners with diverse needs, however, the teacher is expected to make various teaching/pedagogical strategies in an inclusive classroom while interacting with students / learners with diverse needs during his/her teaching, but the focus of pedagogy which being used has to be such that it should be student/learner centric, should be promoting curiosity, developing students' engagement, and basic life skills, further learning, inculcating universal human values. In other words, Pedagogy has to be learner-specific and responsive to learners' specific learning needs (if aids and appliances/ learning equipment are there then proper and best use should be made of the same). Further Pedagogy to be used by the teacher should be contextual from the point of view of learners' background (if first-generation learners are there, socio-culturally disadvantaged learners are there; learners with diverse learning needs or learners with disabilities are there, including slow learners. Pedagogy has to be resource-specific but here it becomes pertinent that whatever resources are available, the proper and best use thereof has to be ensured on the part of teacher. Pedagogy should not be as such to transfer or pass on information related to subject content only, but should focus on clarity or in-depth understanding/knowledge, and should also focus on developing positive attitude, knowledge and skills among students/learners. Besides developing common sense, pedagogy should promote among students/learners self-disciplined outlook, consciousness of righteous conduct and curiosity for lifelong learning and spiritual orientation along with emphasis on *Apara Vidya* and *Paravidya*. Here it also becomes a point of relevance that in the old days/past also teachers were addressing the diverse needs of learners in classrooms but the pedagogical challenges related to pedagogical approaches/strategies were not the issue before teachers as there had not been varying background of students' diversity from the point of view of cultural, social, economic aspects and diverse needs of learners as compared to present times. Further, there had not been social mobility of the kind/type and that intensity/frequency as we have today. Similarly the technological appliances/innovations in pedagogical interventions were also not in practice /use as we have today. In the present time besides various issue and problems there are a number of challenges regarding inclusive classrooms which have direct or indirect learning on pedagogical issues and concerns. For instance, attitudinal barriers, curricular inresponsiveness, poorly equipped inclusive classrooms, insufficient resources, scarcity of funds, social stigma, lack of barriers-free buildings and lack of basic amenities required for accessibility, lack of community participation and joint efforts by local groups, lack of co-ordination and co-operation among different developmental agencies in the context of contribution for inclusive schools/education and in responsive teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service.

Conclusion:

To conclude, in the context of Inclusive schools, Innovative pedagogy has to be characterized by student centric, actively involving Learners (as was there in Socratic method), Contextual (as that of Paul Friere's Critical pedagogy) and should promote experiential learning with focus on lifelong Love for Learning, it has to be creative and activity based, it should also be based on pedagogical principles of Maria Montessori, Friedrich Froebel, Socrates and John Dewey, apart from those of Great Indian and world's educators/thinkers and should also be oriented from the point of view of integration of technology. If needed awareness regarding disabilities and positive attitude among community members, reorganization of teacher education programmes- pre- service and in-service, effective compliance of provisions envisaged in RPWD Act-2016 and recommendations of NEP-2020 regarding inclusive education is ensured by the concerned institutions/Departments including Educational institutions, the ray of hope and desired results towards successful educational progress of Inclusive School Settings can be a mile stone in this direction.

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