Community Connections - Indigenous Adaptations and Inclusive Education

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Abstract

As a group, children with multiple disabilities do not fit within a generic set of facilities universally available to either school going children or vocational opportunities for young adults. With lack of facilities, the daily management and education of the child with special needs has become a challenge. Meeting the needs of disabled young people is a three-way responsibility between universal services available for all children, specialist disability services, and the community. The intent of this project was to help strike the right balance between the three, and use a multi modal approach that integrates holistic and creative practices in the existing learning protocols in schools along with community based rehabilitation. This project was conducted at a government school at Puttenahalli. Using arts-based therapeutic processes like storytelling and music helped break barriers in learning for most of the children, helping them learn better and also increasing their socialization skills. It is hoped under this project at Puttenahalli School to continue work with schools and school authorities to help children with special needs achieve higher learning outcomes, and also improve their capacity to interact with society in general.

Introduction

This study enables us to look at community participation and involvement in bringing about greater levels of social inclusiveness and empowerment of children with disabilities at a school in Puttenahalli 7th phase.

Keywords: children, disabilities, community-based rehabilitation

Review of Literature

It is quite common to see with persons with disabilities (PwDs) every day. But the awareness that one out of every six people in the world has a disability is less common. An estimated 6% of the population or roughly about 70 million in our country are people with disabilities. With regard to children, according to best estimates of international agencies, approximately 98% with disabilities in developing countries do not attend schools (Fourth Wave Foundation, 2014).

The prevalent practice has been of completely segregating these children; at the most, they are integrated (where children with disabilities are placed in the mainstream system, often in special classes). In India, a number of laws and policies regarding inclusion have been

formulated. However, the comprehension and subsequent implementation of the laws are lacking (Fourth Wave Foundation, 2014).

Children with special needs/disabilities do not even have access to preschools at the age of three, forget gaining jobs at age 18. As long as PwDs remain invisible, their issues also remain invisible (Nanagu Shaale, 2014). Considering that three % of all funds of all departments in India are set aside for inclusion and betterment of PwDs at every national and state program, if it were used right and reached the very people who could do the most with it, the world would be a better place for these children and persons with disabilities. The breadth of the challenge necessitates a partnership with various sectors in the community including health, education, labour, vocational, and welfare to name a few (AIFO, 1996).

Need for the Study

The aim of this study was to look at community-based rehabilitation (CBR) to help P, by establishing community-based programs for social integration, equalization of opportunities, and rehabilitation programs for the disabled. The strength of CBR programs is that they can be made available in rural areas with limited infrastructure, as program leadership is not restricted to professionals in healthcare, education, vocational or social services (EFFATA, 2009). Rather, CBR programs involve the people with disabilities themselves, their families and communities, as well as appropriate professionals.

The objective of this study was to begin with the right to equal access to education and give the community the network and tools necessary to spread the word about what children with special needs can do, and with a little encouragement, enable them to be part of the community.

Case Study: Puttenahalli Government School

The core idea of the study was to set an institutional goal for the school to look at both the social skill domain and the curriculum needs of children with varying needs by integrating arts into teaching methodologies within classroom settings involving the community.

The specific objectives at this community and school were to:
- Create an inclusive program that uses creative interventions with the children in the Puttenahalli Government School and their community.

- In the backdrop of the Puttenahalli Lake revival project, work with the children to explore artistic process like storytelling, dance and movement, drumming and music, and theatre in understanding the importance of water, and to create awareness about themselves, the environment and water conservation in the neighbourhood.
- Involve the local communities to start working with the children with special needs and learning disabilities to achieve greater learning outcomes.

Research Method

The methodology and the tools used were:

- Data Sources and Protocols
- Data on Progress and Assessment
- Quantitative analysis of the Observation Data
- Qualitative analysis of artistic material (ABT Tools)
- Periodic Photo documentation.
- Field staff diaries and log reporting
- Simple session wise questionnaires
- Questionnaires
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Portage
- Needs Assessment- Form A

The following documentation was maintained:
- Session-wise plans for each session.
- Session -wise post session observations.
- Photo and video documentation sessions and events.
- The content designed for the sessions was based on the post session documentation and notes
- The class teacher and the teacher in-charge were updated on completion of topics.

Results and Discussion

Government schools today largely have concerns of infrastructure. With the unprecedented growth and urbanization of the city, this today is the concern of community at large. Each child requires meaningful and holistic learning spaces which are co-created by all those who engage with the children.

Through ongoing visits to the Block Education Officer and the school management, one was able to identify and understand facilities available, and the list of children and teachers who would be involved in the project. In the school, all the teachers shared that they fall short of techniques and tools as they work with the children. It was decided to provide children and teachers an understanding of learning and teaching methodologies, keeping in mind inclusion of the children with disabilities in the community, and also actively involve children with disabilities in the school, and the local community members in social spaces like the lake rejuvenation project in the community.

The social domain classes focused largely on breaking inhibition, working with peer groups, narrative capabilities, group dynamics and empathy, and building spontaneity. Sessions in story creating ensured that the children worked in groups, and came up with their stories that the group believed would work. A session on the biography of things like paper was received well by children and helped work on their spontaneity and narrative capabilities. It also re-enforced their learnings from the academic session on deforestation. A special class focused on movements and voice. The group was introduced to voice work with focus on modulation, volume and texturing. As the session picked up, they also learnt some simple movement songs as they sat down in a group.

In one specific example, a 30 student classroom of 7th graders in Puttenahalli school were facing trouble with learning and had been labelled by teachers as a 'slow class'. The students were found non-responsive, their participation levels were low, and they shied away from expressing themselves. This clearly was becoming a barrier in learning.

The children were worked with, to explore artistic process like storytelling, dance and movement, drumming and music, and theatre in understanding the importance of water and to create awareness about themselves, the environment and water conservation in the neighbourhood. The content for the program was created from their Science textbooks and were delivered using multi-art forms. While the theme of the program was academic goals,

and the method artistic, the focus remained in building social skills in children. Within 3 months, there were clear shifts in engagement levels in class, increase in group and individual participation (especially among the shy students), increased interest in learning, and a clear improvement in verbal expression.

Conclusion

Learnings

At one level, this methodology was well received by the children and it is possible to work with larger group sizes when it comes to sessions in storytelling, songs and movement, theatre and role plays. This will allow an interesting diversity to emerge. At another level, to be able to look at measurable and quantifiable shifts in the academic domain, the frequency of sessions and the resources towards it need to be greater. This will allow greater intervention and evaluation. As an example, to help assess how much the children have learnt, worksheets and simple assignments were given. This monitoring is not possible by the existing resources.

Building towards the concepts and the understandings that the sessions brought in and looking at the community, events were conducted. "Monsoon Tales" brought in storytelling and visual arts in the backdrop of rain and water. Conducted at the Puttenahalli Lake premise, the visual story and song session brought together about 60 children and adults from the neighbouring community and the children from the Puttenahalli Government School along with children with special needs from Snehadhara Foundation. It was an evening of colours, stories, music and rhythm.

Challenges

- Given that the learning patterns of the children were already established, it was a challenge to decondition them out to look at a new methodology. It would have been an interesting proposition to have a younger age group for the pilot.
- Retention and recall was an ongoing challenge with the group.

The Future

There are millions of people worldwide who live with, battle, and are compelled to overcome their disabilities every single day of their lives. Nevertheless, they have achieved great things.

Persons with disabilities are perfectly capable of making valuable contribution to society given similar facilities that mainstream society appropriates to make life convenient (Fourth Wave Foundation, 2014). Including this segment of the populace in schools and colleges not only gives them a voice but opens our minds to infinite possibilities when we learn, work and live together. If we could walk hand-in-hand, provide the same opportunities and conveniences, just as we do for ourselves, we make life less of a battle and more of a healthy challenge for all. And the cornerstone of this idea for inclusion is each one of us.

This project has opened a small window for sensitizing various segments of society about the realities of persons with disabilities and their existence in a community where they all belong. This should culminate in a conclave bringing together various stakeholders: organizations of persons with disabilities, NGOs, corporates, government and educational institutes to take the initiative forward as well as share cases of successful initiatives. A small change of perception can make a big difference in the life of persons with disabilities. Become the change and together we can make everything and everyone more able.

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