

Education

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**INTEGRATION OF DISABLED CHILDREN  
INTO NORMAL SCHOOLS**

**Varsha Hooja  
Madhuri Pai**



# REFERENCE



## **INTEGRATION OF DISABLED CHILDREN INTO NORMAL SCHOOLS**

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*Moving from childhood, through adolescence, to adult life is a transition full of experiences with varying degrees of help from families, schools and colleges. Choices may vary from country to country but it is universally accepted that the competence expected of an individual, to contribute to a progressive and competitive society, is becoming more and more complex. There are social and economic barriers on the way to maturity.*

***A person with disabilities finds it harder to achieve full participation in society due to a variety of reasons.***

*A major component for successful transition is appropriate education. In a special school, despite basic educational needs being fulfilled, students often feel isolated and marginalised.*

*'Excused from laboratory work, excused from difficult home work, excused from geometry - excused from life' is how a disabled student expressed his opinion*

RESEARCH

*while commenting on 'unnecessary' concessions given to special children. This quote highlights the need of students with disabilities to be mainstreamed. A very large number of research studies are available on various aspects and experiences of integration. How and at what level should the students be integrated? What concessions if any should be requested of schools for the normal? What is the most appropriate age for integration? What are the special support services required? Is follow-up necessary? If so, how frequently should the follow-up be given? In an integrated classroom, do the teachers and peers require any advance knowledge or basic information about the disabled or differently able students? This has been the subject of research all over the world.*

*In our experience over the last twenty years, we are convinced about the need for integration and we have found that integration takes place at four different levels.*

**PARTIAL INTEGRATION:**

- a) *From a special school at one location to another, for example, our hospital school, Karuna Sadan, (in the Dharavi slums) to C.S.E. at a different location, in Colaba or Bandra.*

- b) *From one special school to another. For example. Karuna Sadan to S.E.C. day school (an integrated municipal school for polio and normal children).*
- c) *From a special school to a community school only for a few hours and*
- d) *Complete integration from a special school to a school in the community.*

*The various aspects which need detailed attention and careful analysis for the success of integration, security and educational advancement of differently able students are manifold. Each one of them requires special attention. We refine the techniques as we go along.*

*The following discussion is based on experiences and data collected from thirty-eight of our students integrated in various schools. It is supported by the discussions held with special educators, therapists and professionals in various schools.*

### **IDENTIFICATION OF A READINESS FOR INTEGRATION.**

*The Spastics Society of India has a special school in the relatively economically backward area of Dharavi which is a very large slum with poor civic facilities*

*like sanitation and water supply. The SSI identified the educational and health needs of the disabled children from these slums and started an integrated education, treatment and immunisation programme at Karuna Sadan. It is a rehabilitation model set up with the help of community - A CBR model. From its inception seven years ago, over six hundred students have availed of various facilities.*

*We have a play group, nursery and reception level facility at our centre. Considering the space constraints and financial implications, the facilities have been restricted to the present level. Intelligent children who can progress academically are integrated at various levels in appropriate schools. Identification of students is based on academic performance, extent of disability, socio-economic background, mobility, therapeutic and transport needs. A professional approach with appropriate weightage to each of these factors is taken. The mother tongue of the students and the medium of instruction at the school also play very important roles in integration.*

*In a nutshell a preliminary case profile of each student is drawn. Each aspect considered is given due weightage with maximum points for academic performance and interest. An appropriate model of integration is planned simultaneously.*

### ***Partial integration from one special school to another. A change of location/ environment***

*Our students at Dharavi are used to a very cosy set-up with small classrooms, familiar environment, with locally adapted toys, neighbourhood friends and, most importantly, community support.*

*We have, at present, partially integrated thirty students in various special schools. The break-up is as shown in Table 1:*

Table 1

Type of Disability	Name of School	How many Integrated
Cerebral Palsy & Other Multiple Disabilities	CSE Colaba & N.C.C.P. Bandra	12
Cerebral Palsy & Other Multiple Disabilities	S.E.C. Day School	1
Polio	C.S.E. Colaba & N.C.C.P. Bandra	11
Polio	S.E.E. Day School	6
Hearing impaired	Nil	
Visually impaired	Nil	
Total		30

Source: Compiled from available data at Karuna Sadan, Dharavi.

*After initial teething problems all the children have adjusted very well to the school environment.*

*The following table gives a break-up of therapy, special educational inputs, the class into which integrating and the age of the child. Remarks are teacher's reflections on the success of integration programme. Refer to Table 2.*

Table 2

Age	Total	Std. in which they were intergrated	Physio therapy	Speech therapy	Special Programmes
3-5 yrs	8	N = 5 KG = 3	7	2	2
5-7 yrs	18	T = 16 KG = 2	16	2	1
7-9 yrs	3	T = 16	2	2	1
9-11 yrs	3	P = 3	3	1	1
11 yrs					
Total	32				

Abrevation N=Nursery, KG=KG, T = Transition, P = Prevoc

*Analysis of the available data shows that the primary problem is communication. The medium of instruction in some of the schools is English. Although familiar with this language and having the necessary basic skills our students from Karuna Sadan lacked confidence in communication. They did not come upto the mark (average level of the class) in number work, writing and, most importantly, speed. This made them excessively dependent on the teachers they knew from Karuna Sadan itself. It must be pointed out that after a little extra input of reading and communication, either in the new school or at Dharavi, a marked improvement was seen.*

## **INTEGRATION FROM KARUNA SADAN TO A COMMUNITY MUNICIPAL SCHOOL.**

*There are three municipal primary and secondary schools in Dharavi, Bombay. The municipal corporation has schemes for encouraging integration in these schools. We have integrated two students at various levels in these schools*

*Although these schools are within the community and there is virtually no change in environment, sixty-six percent of students preferred to remain in the special school or return there. May be it was lack of awareness among the teachers, principals and students of the school that lead to this situation. Problems pointed by the students were: (i) very large size of the class where special attention to a disabled child is impossible - our students therefore felt inadequate. (ii) the psychological pressure reflected on their academic performance, health and well-being as well as on their behaviour. (iii) absenteeism. Almost eighty percent of the students preferred to return to us. This model is, therefore, the least preferred model for integration.*



## **INTEGRATION INTO PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.**

*A complete, full-time integration into a community school is ideal and most desirable. We have adopted this model for various schools, taking into account the socio-economic background of the student concerned, educational level of the parents and availability of transport facility. Table 3 gives the necessary background data.*

Table 3

Location of school	Approx.Distance from Home	Number of students	Fees* levied (add. expenditure)	Medium of instruction	School Transport
Fort Convent	4-5 Km.	1		English	Not used
Campaign School	5 Km	1		English	Uses car
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial School	1 Km	2		English	Not provided
S.I.E.S.	2 Km	2		English	Not provided
Total		7			

Source: Compiled from the available primary data.

Fees are a burden on the family, which they did not have to give at Karuna Sadan.

*The amount mentioned is only to get an idea about the need to consider the economic status of the family.*

*Out of seven students integrated to date, four are doing very well as far as academic progress is considered. Out of the remaining three, one is average and two have dropped out. The results are certainly not very encouraging.*

## **SUPPORT SERVICE**

*Support services like maintenance of calipers, therapy and treatment is not available in these schools. Our therapists provide these inputs.*

*Parents and students require frequent guidance as well as counselling. Social workers at the special school play a pivotal role here. The professionals at special schools are always available for discussions and have an open door policy for quick trouble-shooting.*

## **INDEPENDENT TRAVEL AND MOBILITY TRAINING**

*For financial reasons, fifteen percent of parents prefer their wards to walk or to travel by public transport even though a school bus is available, Fare concessions are provided to all students. A disabled person is given additional ticket concessions, is allowed to enter from the front entrance and avail of special reserved seats. However, familiarity with bus routes, money management, getting on and off the bus, knowledge of bus stops, good road sense and an idea of local topography are essential for total independence. We found that special children are often over-protected and too sheltered to gain these skills. Teachers and therapists run a specific mobility training course to overcome these problems.*

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

*Even after integration, the school social workers and teachers provide financial assistance through sponsorship schemes. Uniforms, shoes, books, stationery and travel is subsidised. Home visits and detailed case-studies are carried out to get an idea about the need and to assess the level of assistance required. Medical and therapy facilities are also provided. Of the thirty-eight students integrated so far, thirty-five maintain a very close contact with the parent school.*

## **SOCIAL CONTACTS**

*Weaning students from a special school to an ordinary school is a difficult task. In our experience, it is a slow process which must be carried out with sensitivity. Attention is paid to various seemingly insignificant aspects. It is well-known that due to disability and associated problems some people have difficulties in forming social relationships. It has been documented that many disabled youngsters prefer to be alone, do not have much peer interaction, have a low self-image and are unsure of their capabilities. It follows that in a special school they grow dependent on the teachers, social workers and therapists. From simple decision-making about participating in cultural programmes to their career choice they look up to a formal contact. In a large,*

*integrated class room with over seventy students per class, individual attention of this type is not possible. Students (a good thirty percent of our sample) have reported such a feeling of neglect and isolation. Even after joining a community school, we encourage our students to return to our school, participate in cultural events, discuss academic progress or socialise. This support really helps them in building new relationships and gaining confidence and a better self-image.*

#### **MEETINGS WITH TEACHERS/ADMINISTRATORS -**

#### **A FOLLOW UP ACTION**

*In our country, awareness about disability is lacking. Typically, the teachers, principals or school administrators have only a vague idea about various disabling conditions and almost no exposure because, in spite of our efforts, integration has not yet been successful or commonplace. Special education is assumed to be an area well removed from the day-to-day curriculum. Therefore, most teachers can understand the problems faced by the disabled i.e. access, transport difficulties, co-ordination problems etc.*

*Our teachers before integration and main-streaming 'prepare' them to accept a special child in a class through initial interviews, lectures, awareness campaigns, visits and slide shows. After the child is integrated, regular visits follow. The concerned teachers thus get an opportunity to discuss problems and a common platform for information exchanges is created. All developmental aspects of the student are discussed at these meetings. In short, teachers from our school play the role of a vigilant guardian and provide all the necessary back-up services to*

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