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Inclusion of Individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties: Contextualization to Pedagogical Issues to Vocationalisation

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The need to focus on, 'Education for all', started emerging in Britain and America, at the end of 1950's and early 1960's. It was at this time that the difficulties that many children were facing with the conventional teaching-learning processes began to attract serious attention. An increasing number of children were found unable to cope with the school work specifically with reading, writing and mathematics. These children were otherwise bright, fairly articulate in their verbal expressions and did not appear to have any form of intellectual impairment, sensory handicap or visual impairment.

On April 6th, 1963, Dr. Samuel Kirk addressed a gathering of anxious parents in Chicago, at which he first used the term learning disabilities to describe these children-

“ this meeting is not concerned with the children who have sensory handicaps, such as the deaf or the blind or with the children who are mentally retarded. It is concerned with the children who see and hear and who do not have marked intellectual deficits, but who show deviations in behaviour and in psychological development to such an extent that they are unable to adjust in the home or to learn by ordinary methods in schools ”

As one reviews the literature, the term Learning Difficulties (LD) is often used also to include slow learners and others with intellectual impairment. One often comes across teachers in the Indian schools using the term, 'slow learners' also for the child with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia and so on. They often tend to interpret the term as children who take time to learn. Of course these teachers may often forget to focus upon the limitations of their own instructional strategies, which cause these children difficulties in output of information, as the school system wants it. This also often leads to the assumption that these individuals are also intellectually challenged. Hence one would

also observe that most contemporary definitions emphasize upon the fact that these are individuals with average to superior intelligence.

Beginning with Orton's coining of the term SLD (Specific Learning Difficulties) in the year 1925 and also linking it with the above arguments and many other related data it becomes highly pertinent that the shift towards the terminology SLD (ie Specific Learning Difficulties) is emphasized rather than LD. Another issue of debate and reflection which is currently the theme of many a brainstorming session in many an academic forums is whether these are Specific Learning Disabilities or Specific Learning Difficulties. A deeper issue centers on a better sensitivity and insight to the art and science of pedagogical issues.

Just to glimpse back a little into the historical perspective of the terms dyslexia, LD, SLD. When the movement towards education for all began in Great Britain, it was found that there were these children who despite normal or above normal intelligence and good conventional methods of classroom teaching-learning processes were not able to learn how to read effectively. They were termed *dyslexic*, from the Greek derivative **Dys** meaning difficulty and **lexia** meaning words. Thus dyslexia literary means *difficulty with words*. Gradually it was realized that there were another set of children and adults who have difficulty with arithmetic. They came to be termed as individuals with dyscalculia and then came the term dysgraphia meaning difficulty with writing. While in America the term Learning Disability / Difficulty emerged almost simultaneously with the term dyslexia. It became an umbrella term for the associated difficulties/disabilities.

In Britain the term dyslexia continued to be also used, as an umbrella term for all the different difficulties mentioned. The major bodies working in India in this area in the cities of Chennai, Mumbai, Chandigarh and Delhi prefer to focus on the umbrella term SLD. The debate within the circles interested in the welfare of these groups of individuals with reference to whether to use the term disability or difficulty still continues.

As one looks at some contemporary definitions related to dyslexia/SLD, it becomes obvious that the issue has lesser to do with the learning capacity of the individual but rather with the streamlined often water-jacketed pedagogical transactions within the educational systems. For example a teacher intern while attempting to understand the pedagogical issues when in training will also but automatically use the repertoire of knowledge one had assimilated in ones conscious and subconscious being while being a part of the educational processes oneself at school. (it may be remembered that one is a part of the school educational system roughly for 12 to 14 years and that to at ones formative years). Those pedagogical practices may or may not have had flexibility as their bench mark.

Secondly it will come naturally to any one, be it the teacher educator at the university or the teacher intern or the schoolteacher to follow those learning and instructional strategies consciously and subconsciously, which had benefited ones own learning processes. How any one person learns depends upon ones brains networking or 'brain-wiring'. It does require deeper insight to accept and then try to understand how best someone else might be learning. Hence it is a task, which requires intense reflection and a complete change of

mindset and a deep understanding of one's own needs as a teacher to be able to accept, internalize and then support alternative methods of learning and instructional processes and then further a combination of alternate methods in the same situation.

One can observe that a person has a physical limitation, one can observe that a person behaves in a manner befitting a younger child and so on. But if a person talks and discusses with you as would anyone else and has a good knowledge about a subject but can not write a simple sentence correctly, or cannot add simple numbers correctly it does become difficult to understand, let alone accept such a difficulty. This is a difficulty or disability, which does not highlight itself clearly. It is a hidden disability. Any set of hidden 'disabilities' will be difficult for other individuals to accept and understand. As anything that is concrete is easier for the brain to perceive, accept and react to than an abstract construct. The processes involved in the 'black box' of the individual with SLD become difficult for a teacher without SLD to even perceive. In other words the processes that happens between the input of stimuli and the outcome as knowledge constructions (in the, 'black box') are not visible or insightful to a person who does not have SLD.¹ The group of that comprise SLD is often thus referred to as a set of hidden disabilities.

The term LD/ SLD is defined as a disorder or difficulty in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding spoken or written language or it may manifest itself as a variation in one or more of the processes such as thinking, listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling or mathematics. These manifested variations may be despite at least average intelligence. In other words these individuals process knowledge differently from the larger population.

The National Joint Council for Learning Disability in 1981 defined it as

“ Learning Disability is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical ability. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g. sensory impairment, mental, social & emotional disturbances or environmental influences e.g. cultural differences, insufficient /inappropriate

¹ My own experience with attempting to teach spelling while try to put myself in the child's 'mental foot' has lead to my spellings getting effected and at times I land up spelling a word the way the child used to. The child now spells the word the way society wants him to spell it. The child has been saved the agony of being called different and unintelligent by society. One will never be able to assess how much of extra energies were put to learn the spellings and how much more could have been achieved if these energies could have been put to some other scholastic use. So much for societies and especially educators' mindset of insisting on watertight compartments of knowledge construction. Is it worth it????

instruction and psychogenic factors). It is not the direct result of these conditions or influences.”

The Association for Children & Adults with learning Disabilities defines it as

“ Specific Learning Disability (SLD) is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which is selectively interferes with the development integration and /or demonstration of verbal and / or non verbal abilities. Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) exists as distinct handicapping conditions in the presence of average to superior intelligence, adequate sensory motor system & adequate learning opportunities. The condition varies in its manifestation and degree of severity.”

Hence SLD is a condition, which exists inspite of average to above average intelligence and appropriate conventional teaching pedagogies. Contrast this with a definition of Mental Impairment as stated by the American Association of Mental Deficiency

“significant sub average general intellectual functioning resulting in or associated with impairments in adaptive behaviour and manifested during the developmental period.”

In India the groups working for and with individuals with SLD do not have their main demands for reservations in jobs, but more towards effective sensitization, appropriate pedagogical issues with examination privileges and reforms and forums for parent professional corporation. The privileges requested during the evaluation processes are also from that perspective. In the absence of larger sensitivity in the education community and changes thereby, here are certain privileges provided by school education evaluation boards such as Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) for children with SLD:

- Exemption from third language (right from the beginning if required)
- An extra hour during the final examinations
- 15-20 minutes extra for unit tests.
- Use of scribe (writer). A scribe can be any child in a class atleast one year below that of the child with SLD.

Research in the west as well as in India indicates that nearly 10-15% of the population has specific learning disabilities/ difficulties. Hence in a school of about 4000 children nearly 400-500 children will show signs of SLD. Fortunately the mild forms of SLD are more common than the severe forms. Hence with the relevant inputs in the teacher education programmes and the school and college systems, these individuals can be

easily included into the regular classrooms. At this point it also needs to be stated that behavioural problems and loss of self-esteem in these individuals are secondary manifestations and not the primary manifestations and need to be treated as such. It also needs to be focused upon that such individuals have certain strengths, which because of the limitations of our education system often go unnoticed and undeveloped.

Just to name a few of the famous Dyslexics/ SLD: *Agatha Christie, John. F. Kennedy, Beethoven, Mozart, Thomas Edison, Michael Faraday, Albert Einstein, Hans Christian Andersen and Tom Cruise.*

This does not mean that every child with specific learning disability will become an Albert Einstein, but it does good for a teacher to understand and more so for the student to know that their brain wiring are similar to that of individuals such as Albert Einstein and that one can learn and be a highly productive member of society.

Considering the content of the previous paragraph, the children and young adults with specific learning disabilities/ difficulties can easily be included into the regular education systems at school and college levels:

As educationist and others are aware

Inclusion Education means individuals with disability and individuals with non-disability learning together in ordinary preschools, provisions, schools, colleges and universities with appropriate networks of supports. Inclusion means enabling pupils to participate in the life and work of mainstream institutions to the best of their abilities, whatever their needs.

Inclusion is a philosophy built on the belief that all people are equal and should be respected and valued as an issue of basic human rights. Inclusion can be viewed as an unending set of processes in which children and adult who are differently abled have the opportunities to participate fully in all activities offered to people who do not have the so called disabilities.

The contemporary paradigm shift has been initiated with the thinking that there are no problem children but problem situations. Hence the major focus of any difficulty exhibited by the child in learning is not to be attributed to the problem within the child but the limitation of the education system to facilitate learning in the child.

‘Inclusion’, is enabling pupils to participate in the life and work of ‘mainstream’² institutions to the best of their abilities, what ever their special needs. Hence inclusive classrooms reach out beyond the classroom into the larger community and evoke a sense of belonging to the diverse heterogeneous human family as well as provide a diverse

² Of course there is this debate about mainstream from whose perspective!!, yet let us not go into that at this forum.

heterogeneous environment to grow and learn. Inclusive education appreciates the unique and diverse characteristics and abilities and capabilities of all its members.

It is but obvious that it would be a wiser step to have children integrated into the regular schools, colleges and other educational institutes as far as possible as it would prepare them and their counterparts best for an integrated society and life.

Emerging from the above an important paradigm shift in the definition of inclusion is highlighted:

“That any difficulty that in a child exhibited in learning was to be attributed not to a problem within the child, but to the school system. The organizations and management of schools and the various programmes of teaching and interventions could also be one of the causes of the individual’s learning difficulties.”

Inclusion however is not advisable without certain infrastructure changes. These infrastructure variations would need to be maneuvered in accordance to the particular special needs being catered for in the inclusive classroom.³ These could be categorized under

- Physical
- Instructional Transactional Processes⁴
- Psycho-social mindsets

Inclusive education would be facilitated not only by special education related services within the society and the education system but also the ‘in-class support’. The in-class support would further consist of embedded support within the educational

³ For example the child with dyslexia does not need special physical provisions such as a ramp, a barrier free toilet and so on. This child would definitely need to sit near the teacher, away from noisy children, away from a door or window with too much of movement, be permitted to have photostated notes, be allowed to work with abacas, a computer or laptop and so on. Such a child would also need the teacher read out the question paper and at times even the comprehension paragraph in the question paper.

⁴ The way these children learn is very different from the way a child with intellectual challenge would learn. The child with intellectual challenge has similar ‘brain wiring’ as any other person but it tends to work a slower or limited speed or levels. Hence breaking the knowledge constructs into smaller bites and repetition are effective of instructional processes. While the ‘brain wiring’ of the child with SLD is not slower or limited, it just is different. It’s like expecting a car (however high speed) and a helicopter to take the same route to reach the same particular destination. Here comes in the need for **multisensory approach** in the inclusive classroom. These children tend to take in a holistic perspective and hence are generally least bothered about, ‘mundane things’, such as a comma, a full stop, putting or deleting the alphabet, ‘e’ from a word, place values, putting numbers down in a straight vertical line and so on.

Visuals and sounds and appropriate movements stimulate a massive range of cortical skills, which often go untapped in our regular classrooms. (Buzan & Buzan, 2005)

pedagogies as well as special external support in different settings. These embedded and external support is best when it comes from a team consisting of school personals, peers, therapists, special education teachers, administrators, psychologist, counselors, volunteers and other resources.

So far this article has attempted to highlight certain basic understanding of the issues related to the definitions and boundary of the umbrella term dyslexia or specific learning disabilities. It then moved on focus upon the issues shifts in the concept of the term inclusion. The emphasis of this article now moves to certain pedagogical issues, which hinder the effective inclusion of the individuals with specific learning disabilities in the regular classrooms. As one reads through these paradigms, one may also get the impression that this is applicable for any effective learning teaching environment. If so emerges the feeling of the reader, the author would consider that the attempt to emphasis that the limitations are in our pedagogical inputs and hence the instructional transactions rather than in the child have been well highlighted.

Research states that specific learning disability (SLD) is a highly heterogeneous group. My direct work with individuals with specific learning difficulties over the past two decades has also shown the heterogeneity within this group. Due to this heterogeneity across these children with special needs the school teachers as per their present training in most Indian Schools, find it very difficult to translate what they learn about one child with SLD that they may be working with in a particular year to another child with SLD in their class the next year. At times we also tend to have preconceived ideas that a particular stream of subjects are easier and others and difficult. As teacher educators and school teachers and administrators we need to understand that some of these individuals may have their strength areas in the sciences, others in humanities and still others in the commerce stream. What may be considered, as 'easy subject', for one may actually be a difficult subject for another.

There are these general classroom accommodations for children with SLD. These can be categorized into the following categories of Evaluation Processes, Classroom teaching leaning processes and School, Family & Community Networking (Malaviya, 2007)

Beyond this are certain major shifts in paradigms which need to be focus upon:

1. The processes of constructing Knowledge rather than knowledge as a finished product:

In the field of education undoubtedly the focus is shifting from dissemination of knowledge by the 'expert' to the so-called 'novice' to the facilitation of the construction of knowledge. (Apple & King 1985) The contemporary need is to understand oneself and to further sensitize the learner to the processes involved in the construction of knowledge

and not knowledge as a finish product. This may obviously not be a very easy task, but surely it would lead to better outputs from school education.

In order to gain better insight into the issue of SLD and how constructing knowledge as a process over knowledge as a finish product supports the learning environment of the child with SLD. Let us just peep into the major neuro-developmental constructs involved in the construct of knowledge that is involved in school education.

They are

- Regulation
- Organization
- Presentations
- Interpretation & Implementations
- Sophistication

Regulation is based upon attention and which involves mental energy controls, processing controls and production controls.

Similarly **Organization** consists of temporal sequential ordering and spatial ordering. **Temporal sequential ordering** would further have divisions such as assimilating basic time & seriation concepts and vocabulary, musical rhythms, phonetic segmentation & resynthesis, narrative organization in writing, prioritization & schedule planning, stepwise work & problem solving, appreciation of historical perspective, awareness, perception, memory, output, time management and higher sequential thinking. While **Spatial Ordering** would consist of Spatial awareness, spatial perception, spatial memory, spatial output, material management, higher spatial thinking (visual discriminatory abilities, visual-motor integration, appreciation of visual boundaries, spatial planning in writing, focus on visual details, perceive part/ whole relationships in maths ect, non-verbal reasoning with spatial concepts, graphic representations of knowledge.

Moving on to **Preservation:** (Short term_Memory, Active working memory, Long term memory), it would have areas such as deliberate paired associated learning, symbolic visual memory, frequent use of episodic memory, stress on convergent single item recall, procedural sequential recall, storage and recall of multiple directions, rapid simultaneous recall, automatized recall of facts and procedures, use of mnemonic strategies, rapid rule recall, convergent activation of prior knowledge, metamemory sophistication, cumulative recall and so on.

Similarly the other larger areas of neuro-developmental constructs, namely Interpretation & Implementations as well as Sophistication also have so many further smaller constructs. (Levine, M)

Now if the school teacher is sensitive to these smaller categories of constructs and after due teacher based and finally psychologist based diagnosis transacts in accordance the information into the learning processes for the individual child, the child does not get

labeled and the education system is able to reach to the very root of where learning requires alternate pedagogies.

Let's take a very simple example of an individual who has a problem with space management.⁵ Such a person may have a problem in the perception of words such as 'pre-service', or the conceptual differences between a full stop (.) and a comma (,) or an inverted comma (') or the distance to be left between two words while writing a sentence. Probably in the Hindi language those children who just do not grow out of perceiving the difference between two *matras* of the same group may also be having a space management problem or a problem related to directionality. With practice and associative learning, they do learn to use the full stops, the comma, the *matras* correctly, yet when under pressure due to time (for example while note taking, completing an assignment) or under stress (due to examinations, trying to cover-up one's low self-esteem) and so on the child again reverts back to making the same 'mistakes'.⁶

As school teachers and also scholars of education and psychology we at times wrongly tend to believe that languages which have a stronger phonetic base are easier for the child with dyslexia or dysgraphia. Research findings with reference to the Hindi language has shown that these individuals face problems in such languages not because of phonetic segmentations related areas but because the individual may have a perceptual variation with space management, or sequential ordering or spatial output or perceived part/ whole relationships.

Do I as a school teacher understand those processes or for that matter even the existence of these constructs. Was I anywhere in the B.Ed programme/ other training programme exposed to these constructs and its applications as to how I may transact the school curriculum with their support? For example if I am aware that the child needs special attention in the temporal sequential ordering in the English language or in mathematics, then I as a teacher may find ways and means to facilitate how to evolve or use another path to facilitate it. When the move shifts to identification and dealing with the sub-concepts which hinder further learning processes or which require alternate teaching-learning processes, the very need and reliance on holistic labeling becomes obsolete.

This would also have a direct implication to career counseling and vocationalisation. For example if the class teacher along with the support from the school counselor and psychologist finds that expressive language is the limitation and not the strength of the child and fine motor functions and graphomotor functions are the strengths then the individual's strengths can be directed towards computer graphic related vocationalisation. Or individuals who have strengths in spatial awareness but may have limitations in

⁵ Such as child would be diagnosed and labeled as dyslexic or dysgraphic or dyscalculia, depending upon other accompanying constructs.

⁶ It is said that the most consistent thing about a child with SLD is the child's inconsistency.

A little exercise that I often do in sessions with in-service teachers is to insist that the blue color is not blue but it is red. As I proceed with the interactive session, I would suddenly ask what color is this, the people find it very difficult to say red and the person who is paying the maximum attention makes the maximum mistake is redefining the name of the color. It also irritates and frustrates many others. Now if you are a child with SLD would you not start to appear hyperactive to the class teacher??

temporal sequential ordering may be geared towards vocations that predominately focus upon 3-dimensional perspectives. Probably such an individual would be good in geometry but find the concepts of algebra difficult.

If we the teachers were to change are mindsets about special needs such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and so on and zero down to more specific specifications, we would be able to address those more effectively in the regular classrooms and hence the number of children with specific learning difficulties who would become highly affective members of the society and that to with good mental health would increase. No doubt this would mean a better insight and sensitively to enmeshing the different neurodevelopment constructs into the transaction of the school curriculum and link it with a better understanding of the possible career options for the individual. This would also enable the teacher to gain insight to this vastly heterogeneous group clubbed together as 'dyslexic', 'dysgraphic', 'dyscalculic' and so on

The individuals with SLD generally has a problem with figure-ground differentiations and have difficulty with the extra stimulus. Good writing is important but if a child will not really ever be able to develop a great writing then understanding were does the concept of good handwriting fit into the larger schemes of the objectives of education and the support that the emerging technology is now able to provide is pertinent.

This would lead to a much better understanding of not only being able to provide individualized instructions in a large group classroom settings for the identified individual with special needs but also for all children who would be considered not needing specialized attention.

2. Concept of small groups within the larger classroom group: Lesson Planning for each individual.

Differential instructions for inclusion are a difficult propositions for many a teachers. Probably the issues arises from trying to homogeneous the class of 40 or so odd learners into one standardized group of learners. By homogenization, our effort at planning may decrease manifold but the final output may suffer.

In theory the teacher interns may be informed that the teaching learning processes in the classroom must focus upon each and every child as an individual. Our lesson planning actually plans for a highly homogeoueos group. The physical infrastructure and classroom movements of the classroom are also not given its due importance. Attempts have been made with in-service motivated teachers to evolve lesson plans keeping the heterogeneity within the classroom in focus and simultaneously emphasizing upon multisensory approach. The actual presentation slot of the lesson plan was categorized into 4 -5 groups and the class was mentally grouped into these 4-5 groups by the teacher concerned and transactions were planned for these groups which would take place almost simultaneously in the classroom. Attempts were made to plan out vertical, collateral and alternate activities and assignments. Peer tutoring, assistant teachers and resource corners were stressed upon. This did involve a lot of planning with children with different

disabilities ranging from visual impairment, auditory impairment, SLD, ADDHD and Cerebral Palsy.⁷

Teachers were encouraged to preserve these kits for the coming years. Questions that arouse were the school administrators' almost complete insensitivity towards providing space for work area and storage to their teachers. Doctors, Architects, Engineers, Artist all have their own specific set of kit. Which is a must identification of a particular profession. Where are the kits of the teachers?? Do the teacher education institutes emphasis on its importance or do we ourselves undermine it??

3. Heterogeneous Teaching in all classrooms: Importance of Resource Kits and Resource Centers:

An engineer has a kit, which they need at work, an architect brings ones own kit for work, a doctor carries ones medical bag. Similarly beginning from the pre-service programme, teachers need to be encouraged to carry a kit consisting of cost effective indigenous multisensory material. The colleges were I have spend more than half my life on this earth uses peer pressures effectively for encouraging teachers to be better at their jobs. Can the same procedure be used to encourage the school and college teachers to have resource kits for different contents??

Secondly my class of teacher interns also has a couple of students who are SLD but have not been diagnosed. Have I tried to transact information and knowledge construction in different alternate ways?? I simply must reflect upon various alternate methods of transacting within my classroom. Does my kit as a teacher have activities and assignments related to the neuro-developmental constructs that I do not intend to spend too much of time on as a larger group of my learners would be able to negotiate through those themselves. The few that I am aware will need extra inputs on that particular construct I should be able to direct towards the resource kit. The kit could have alternate assignments, or scaled activities to make the construct clearer. A resource kit or a resource corner enables more learning to take place using experiential situations.

Equipment such as electronic dictionary and thesaurus, alphabet strips, table squares, electronic spellers and calculators, books on tape, folders with lots of writing frames and mind maps, word processors that let children see and hear what they're writing as well as other softwares and ofcourse a quite corner in the classroom with the resource kits or permitting the dyslexic child to record the classroom interactions are just some of the easier ways of permitting variations within the classroom and including the learners with SLD.

⁷ What we did not manage to reach out to was a even more challenging group of learners namely the gifted individual with specific learning difficulties. Such a child as we are all aware is also referred to as a 2e child (twice exceptional). This child is cognitively gifted but can't take in enough information due to auditory, visual, or sensory processing issues.

Every child is unique. When students are diverse, teachers can either "teach to the middle", or face the challenge of diversifying their instructions. Nearly all teachers believe that it's better to differentiate instruction,—but the challenge lies in translating that belief into action and getting out of ones, 'comfort zones'. This is what an experienced teacher has to say about resource corners and Differentiating Instruction

"This differentiation is exhausting, frustrating, and time-consuming—but I would never go back to the old way".

From an experienced teacher
(downloaded from the website)

4. Contextualising the larger societal context with reference to the individual with SLD and the educator.

If we are to look at the child according to the Systemic Model or Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development - any individual or child is influenced and affected by a series of processes. Bronfenbrenner has conceived of these ecological environments as a set of four nested systems. In the case of a young child, one of the major **microsystem** may consist of the home environment with parents and siblings. Another important **microsystem** may be the school environment, with teachers and peers. The **mesosystem** presents the links between the microsystems settings where the individual takes part directly i.e. the impact of home and school environment on each other. The next system is the **exosystem** in which the individual does not take part, directly but which affects the individual indirectly. For example, the parents' own background, ideology and aspirations or even the parents' work environment. Even the amount of technology in the parents' work environment will affect the child indirectly. The last setting is the, '**macro-system**'. This relates to the general organisation and ideology of the society of which the individual is a part. Each of these layers has three major dimensions, namely- physical space and materials, social roles and relationships and the individual's activities. Thus, the child's development depends upon a highly complex product of whatever qualities the child herself / himself brings to the system, as well as the interactive effects of all the layers in this system.

Parents whose work or home environment has multisensory soft wares are able to facilitate the child to use softwares such as dragon speaking, or diminish the fear of wrong spellings by teaching the child to use the computer as a support. When the child cannot recall the exact word, the thesaurus and the red line under the word for a spelling helps the child.

Contextualising oneself in the larger societal context as a teacher and a teacher educator or a parent, one needs to introspect why I as a teacher is not/unable to provide the type of inputs to my class children who learn differently. Answers to this will also depend upon how strong is my understanding of myself as me the person and me the teacher as also

my needs, aspirations, strengths and limitations.⁸ As the ideology of the society (macro system) moves towards inclusion, acceptance of SLD increases in schools and in the public domain.

5. Being an *Effective Classroom Manager*:

Facilitating support for children with specific learning difficulties also involves understanding and eliciting the best out of each and every child in the classroom. This requires the classroom facilitator (read as teacher) to be an effective classroom manager. The effective classroom managers are skilled in areas such as 'Encouraging Engagement' and peer support and peer tutoring for the child with special needs. For example they know that children with dyslexia, dysgraphia or dyscalculia would need to sit with a more organized child who is ready to share ones work and be the mentor. Who will help the child be on the right page in the right book. They utilize instructional scaffolding and different levels of questioning for different children at different point of time in the same classroom and also who have insight into the impact of classroom movement management. Above all they preserve students' dignity to the maximum and avoid arguments. For example they will not ask a child with dyslexia to stand up and read until unless the child wants to do it oneself. They follow- through with brief interventions. When children with SLD find a person who is ready to hear them, they often tend to talk often repeating the same thing again and again. This is their way of making sense of the environment around them. This is were brief, factual to the point yet supportive interventions and follow ups help Hence while making the curriculum engaging for ones entire spectrum of students the teacher needs to be also sensitive towards how to negotiate specially amongst ones students with special needs their anger, projections, depressions, their conflicts and stresses.

The child with SLD is at par with certain neuro-developmental constructs with relation to ones peer group, in some others the child may be way ahead while in still others the child's processing of those concepts and the output may be very different from the rest of the peer group. Thus the teacher of the inclusive classroom needs to be effective in ones ability to provide "vertical enrichment" as well as "alternative enrichment" activities along with encouraging peer mentoring.

⁸ As a go along in my profession my mindset that all people in the caring professions such as teachers, doctors, nurses, counselor, social workers and so on need to be put on the provial Freudian Couch in order to let go of some of their biases and to understand the biases that they are unable to let go off. When I am a confident person with reasonably good command over by professional requirements, I am able to not get upset to the point of 'destructive aggressive behaviour' because me the teacher has not been able to reach out and help the child. Hence when the child with dyslexia tells you-the teacher- 'You are jealous of me!' you do not get upset. You prove further and you realize the child of even say grade IX may say such a thing when all he/she wanted to state was that, 'you do not understand me'. The retrieval of the word/ concept went wrong in this case.

It is said that the most consistent thing about a child with SLD is the child's inconsistency, the question that one wishes to leave the reader with is to conceptualize the strategies and understanding that would be needed to transact a subject content to this child who 'changes' almost everyday?

5. Development of support systems: Parent-Professional Collaborations

Education does not take place in a vacuum. The learner is not a machine where in direct inputs and output systems work. The learner needs not only the support of the education system but of the family and the larger society. The teachers and the other education personals are the ones with expertise in the process of transaction of the knowledge bases. Hence initiation of the process of parent- professional collaborations lies on the shoulders of the education system. The stronger is the networking between the family and the school, better will be the Human Support Systems of the learner. Such a system would facilitate the child to arrive at a realistic understanding of one's strengths and limitations as well as better transaction of effective strategies to learn and learning to learn. Some areas of strengths, which are found in many children with SLD are: artistic skills, musical skills, creativity, global thinking, curiosity and tenacity, math conceptualization skills, 3-D visual-spatial skills, mechanical abilities, vivid imagination, intuition and/ or athletics abilities.

While some difference in how they learn are because of differences in the

- assimilation and categorization of information and knowledge:
- Information filling systems in the brain
- Construction of knowledge
- Figure ground differentiation
- Separating out parts of a whole
- Filtering mechanism of brain
- Ability to focus on minute details
- Space and Time Organization

Above all it is very clear to the child that he/she is different

It needs to be realized that the family system consists not only of parents but also siblings, grandparents aunts and uncles Neighbours and neighbourhood peers and other friends also form an important component of the child's human systems especially in the Indian context. While the education system consists of not only the class teacher but also the class friends and others teachers, non-teaching staff and the administrators. Reassure the parents and helping them evolve a support group will have them come to terms with the issue. Networking is the key word for providing support for these children. Sometimes even simple things as providing contact numbers of other parents who would be supportive goes a long way in empowering the parents. With the support of parents an individualized daily checklist and other instructional support systems can and are being developed for the child with parent-professional collaborations. The process of softly

weaning the child towards independent living and decision-making if done with parental collaborations has longer lasting effects. Once the parents are able to understand and become partners in the process, it has been observed that they tend to gain so much of insight that they become the experts in the area.

Bronfenbrenner argues that the best schemes for the overall development of any child are those that involve the families, since those that focus on the child alone tend to have only short term effects. He argues that if parents are involved throughout they can sustain the effects after the programme is over. Bronfenbrenner's model demonstrates how changes in the macro- system affects the exo-system and leads to changes in the child's meso-system and micro-system. Hence, lies the importance of keeping in focus beyond the micro level while conceptualising and designing investigations. For example as the larger macro-education thinking of our country moves towards accepting individuals who are differently abled⁹, acceptance of instructional differentiations within the classroom become possible and the individual's acceptance of self with variation and still an important contributing member of society becomes possible.

6. Diagnostic Labeling: Of the person or the construct??

Children Who learn together learn to live together.
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Inclusion begins from the beginning of the education system There are certain nursery schools where the children just knew one has to help each other. They knew that you do not have to go out of your way to help the child who comes to class with clutches with his arithmetic, but you may get a glass of water for him when you go to get one for yourself. But for another child you must be patient when he/she cannot put a easy zigzaw together but he/she can very well go and get his/her glass of water himself/ herself.

Here are some narratives collected from children from different regular schools, who have friends in their schools who are children with SLD.

"He will continue to make mistakes with carry over sums for a very long time. If he had to do only and only that sum he does not make that many mistakes. I can manage many tasks together. But he is so good with playing the casio."

⁹ About 2 decades back the teacher educators at large, many school principals and the public definitely was not open to the idea that an individual could not read or write inspite of schooling and still become a novelist or a person who had problems with simple arithmetic could actually be able to run entrepreneurship with large-scale money transactions.

“It is not that she does not know the nitrogen cycle ma’am. It’s just that it does not come out neat on her copy. Wish they could test her in some other way. She knows many more things that other children do not know.”

I: Child! You are missing your study time to be a scribe for this child.

Scribe(from class VII): Ma’am this is also very important. We must learn to help each other.

Another Scribe: I want to become an IAS officer. I must understand the different type of problems and different type of people in this world.

Here are some comments as to how a larger labeling does not necessarily get to the root of the problem specially in the case of individuals with SLD. Every individual with SLD is different from other individuals with SLD and yet they have certain commonalities. Rather than a holistic labeling, it is better to understand the particular construct which needs to be addressed.

Child with Dyslexia: How do you want me to read? The way I understand what I am reading or the way I am supposed to read in class?

Child with Dyscalculia: I really really want to be an astronaut. (Brings down his voice to almost a whisper) Aunty!! You know! I know much more than the topper of all the sections (read as all the sections of the same grade) Who is to believe me?

Child with SLD: Oh!! Only if I could get through the competitive exam. I CAN DO IT.

7. Family Therapy approaches vs. Individual Therapy Approaches

Family therapy evolves around the philosophy that any changes that one may attempt to bring about in an individual will depend upon the networking and requisite change in dynamics within the larger family. In family therapy the entire family and extended members involved with the individual are a part of the therapy. Here are some example of:- if the larger family is not sensitive to the issues of the child with SLD, the confidence and alternate learning processes of this child will be affected.

Parent: When all the relatives get together, and the children are together, it becomes so difficult to hide that she is not doing

well in school.

Relative: There is this niece of mine, her parents are so worried. She just does not want to open her books. I have counseled her also. The school says do not force her to study too much. But if she does not study how will she get into any competitive examinations.

Parent: I wanted to go and thank the school. But its two years when he finished his class XII, I just have not been able to do it. There are soo many bad memories. I do not blame him for not wanting to go back to meet his teachers. He says he might just land up slapping some of them-atleast especially one of them.

Relative: All children of our family are good in studies. 'Patha nahi yeh kaha se bade ho gaya?'. One does not know where he is born from?

Child: I do not like to go visiting Uncle & Aunt. They do not like me as I am not good in studies.

Below is an abstract of the type of enquiry that many parents with child with SLD keep receiving. The irony of the situation is that many a times these persons have been referred by individuals working in the education system both at school and college level. Ofcourse this also highlights the need for awareness not only about dyslexia/ SLD but many other areas of special needs. Please also try to note how a labeling is harmful for both the cases. It undermines the strengths of one and prevents the other from gaining effective inclusion advantages.

Person Asking for Advise: I got your number from----/ I am-----. My nephew is dyslexic. Your child is also dyslexic?

Parent: Yes

Person Asking for Advise: How did your child get through the board Examinations? Does CBSE give some advantages to these children?

Parent: Yes! They are------. Have you got him tested??

Person Asking for Advise: Yes

Parent: What does the report say??

Person Asking for Advise: His IQ range is between 55-60.

Parent: Does the report say that he is dyslexic?

Person Asking for Advise: No! But it states something about not being able to study till the end of the school system.

Parent: dyslexics are those who have difficulty in reading and writing but they can still complete school and go beyond. My child's IQ is in the range of 110-120. Your nephew's case is slightly different. May I direct you to experts who would be able to advice you better.¹⁰

8. Encouraging the individual to be an advocate of ones strengths

Children with multiple disabilities may also have specific learning issues, but generally the child in the regular classroom with learning difficulties is above average or average in intelligence and many of them with strong bend towards creativity. They tend to have more strength from the right brain. Hence as the child grows and matures, it has been seen that the child needs to be made to understand where their strengths and limitations lie. Studies in the Indian context highlight that even peers of children in the preadolescent period when asked tend to highlight the strengths and limitations of child with disabilities. They generally do not label them. It is the adults in the children's life who find it easier to put information into categories and hence the process of labeling becomes more and more rigid. Here are examples from the narrations of some of the children who have been identified and certified as dyslexic, dysgraphic and dyscalculia and have been

¹⁰ As this article focuses upon the individuals with SLD, let me focus upon the parent of the child with dyslexia first. The parent over the years has some how come to terms with the fact that it will be a on going struggle to enable the child to receive the opportunities which are rightly entitled to him and simultaneously proving to the society that he is just like any other kid with being good at some things and not good at other things. It is a everyday dilemma to see ones child's brain working 4 times harder than that of other children his age and still not receiving the benefits of getting at times even passing marks. The parents' frustration at the education system whose main job seems to be to kill people psychologically those whose brains refuse to learn the way teachers want to teach. And on top of that the educational experts putting a firm negative label and not only that but further advertising to others that the child is not capable of anything. The above stated parent was able to 'keep ones cool' only because the parent has gone through such dialogue on different occasions with different individuals and has now reigned oneself to it. The case of the child with intellectual limitation and the family is another difficult case, which is given verdict by some of our "professors sitting in ivory towers". That would definitely be content of discussion in another article, by the author.

provided support by CBSE. Simultaneously their school and family had taught them to negotiate for themselves and focus towards enhancing their strengths.

I can spell really large words accurately; my problem is with understanding where to use the correct vowels.

I know my multiplications and divisions well, but the problem comes when the numerical is given in the form of a paragraph. It's my reading which is bad and not my maths concepts.

When people around me are talking or even whispering I find it difficult to concentrate and hence a seat near the window is just not a good idea for me. I also need breaks very often. I cannot be at a task for too long.

I have a problem with directionality and hence I find it difficult to get my physics numerical from the chapter on speed correct or for that matter even some of the geometry theorems. Wish they would give choice between algebra and geometry in the examinations.

I can think up a storyline well and narrate it to you but putting it on paper is not my strength. Although I plan to direct plays but getting into English (Hons) or journalism may be difficult for me. I have heard that there is a software that converts talk into the written word, I plan to learn how to use that.

Although I have cleared the BBA entrance examination, but I went and saw the college, they have just one OHP for the entire college and so the teaching will be only chalk and talk. That is not good for me. I am looking for some place which will use more of audiovisuals.

Sir! Can I get an inside room in the hostel. Too much of movement of people coming and going is highly distracting for me than it is for most people.

9. Encouraging Team building

Collateral and cooperative learning are important means of not only learning but also getting along with others and clubbing the strengths of different individuals together in order to reach similar desirable goals. Below is the example of a child with specific

learning disability whose school and family environment provided opportunities for learning to work in a team and another was not given the requisite advantage of learning to work with teams. At the college level, their peer and the adults in their respective professional internships accept both these individuals with dyslexia so differently. Team work involves

- Delegations of duties
- Taking up responsibilities
- Highlighting strengths
- Using alternate resources
- Sharing the information
- Consolidating the information to complete the project.

Both the young adults have been working on their research projects in a team and are expected to complete and submit a report of the research as a group.

Amit is aware that he is not good at comprehension and at writing a summarization. He has negotiated with his tem members that he will surf the internet and bring back as much information of relevance to the group. He will help in putting together the themes for the development of the questionnaire. He will go and administer the questionnaire to more than the number of people allotted to him if required. He can also do the tabulation of data effectively. What he informed his team is that he is not very good with analysis and drawing conclusions, sitting in the library and taking out requisite references and putting the questionnaire in the correct format. Hence the team saw this as Amit volunteering to do work instead of him as a liability to the team. Amit also keeps a little notepad where he jots down point for him to remember. (It is another matter, his handwriting being bad, he often is not able to read what he has written himself). Intuitively Amit at times realizes that the group is not happy with his efforts, he is learning how to tell them what all he did and that he is sorry he could not get the required outputs. Amit is accepted as an important member of the team.

On the other hand Geeta, does not really understand her strengths. Her teammates say that she has a lot of knowledge and it is a pleasure in ones free time to sit with her and listen to the insights she can give you on different topics. Her teammates problem is that what ever task you give her she will not complete it. They think she is a 'shirker'. When Geeta is not able to complete a task she looks at it as a failure, finds it difficult to admit that she was not able to do it as it is not her strength. She makes excuses, which her teammates are able see as, 'half baked lies' and they get more and more upset with her and so does the faculty-in-charge. Geeta ultimately absence herself on the most crucial days and leaves the group in even more difficult a situation. She has started to loss friends and

*support in large leaps. You can observe she is desperately waiting for the year to end so that she can move away.*¹¹

These examples were of advocacy or rather negotiation of ones strengths and delimit ones limitations. Advocacy also means being able to assertively and not aggressively insist that I have the privilege of being provided a scribe and being able to request the invigilators not to speak loudly in the examination hall because it is even more distracting for me than for others.

10. Understanding the learning styles of each and every child in the classroom.

Pedagogical issues do not emerge from the point the child enters the formal education system, rather they are present from the time the child commences ones life. The teaching learning processes that the parents had been exposed to influence the way they interact with their child. The type of achievement orientations and aspirations that had governed their lives are translated to the child. Hence when the school system receives a child, the child is not a *tabula rosa*- hereditary and the environment has already left its mark on the life pattern of the child. Thus when effective educational systems attempt to elicit the best out of the child with them, they simply must work in partnership with the family of the child. In a country such as India where the influence of the extended and joint family systems still remain strong, the effective classroom teachers, counselors administrators try and understand the family systems of the child when they are attempting to understand the child.

No educational systems can construction knowledge for the child or the individual. Different children learn by different means. One may be an auditory learner, visual learner, kinesthetic learner, global learner or a combinations of any of the above. Hence in any classroom different children have different learning styles by which they learn best. Similarly in any classroom different teachers have different teaching styles and the different teachers teach best in their own particular way. Multimedia and other technological inputs not only support multi-sensory and multi-methodology teaching learning processes, they enable better conceptualization of concepts and ideas.¹²

When a teacher is teaching she/he teaches with the assumption that the children are learning or rather constructing knowledge in a similar way as to what she/he had done when she/he had constructed that knowledge for themselves. But the way the individual with SLD's brain is wired is very different from the way that teacher's brain is wired or

¹¹ Geeta has information but does not know how to share it appropriately. She is highly disorganized but good at convincing people. She has good verbal skills.

¹² Television watching world wide is looked as a deterrent to the schooling processes, but in the case of child with dyslexia, dysgraphia, structured television watching facilitates the learning processes. Television and other multimedia provide pictures as the major source of information. Pictures stimulate much more cortical skills than does auditory learning.

that of the larger population of individual's brain is wired. Or in other words the way the SLD child perceives the environment is very different from the way most teachers and the fellow students perceive the environment and hence the path that this child takes to arrive at the solution is very different. Now when the teacher attempts to use clues and supports and scaffolds in the classroom she does it in the way that she/he had learnt and had been taught and perceives that everyone learns that way. Hence the first step for the teacher is to be sensitive to the fact that each child learns differently and more so the child with SLD. The same sequences and steps to derive a concept may not necessary apply for this. As the child with SLD grows and matures they are often able to state how they learn best. Parents are often encouraged to follow the strategies for learning that the child wishes to use. Experienced teachers often ask their learners with dyslexia/ SLD how they want to learn.

When one uses multi-sensory approach and multi-sensory instructional material the teacher automatically takes care of a variety of learning styles and it is but obvious if the same knowledge is received by the child in a variety of ways the chances of the child understanding and accommodating it into ones cognition is enhanced greatly.¹³

12.The concept of multiple intelligence

Many of these children are gifted, talented and highly intuitive. Such individuals are faced by double problems in our highly categorized knowledge constructs. A 2e (twice exceptional) child is cognitively gifted but can't take in enough information due to auditory, visual, or sensory processing issues. It is like an adult in grade 7. ie. curriculum too simple, but difficulty lies in taking in 'soo' much of information non stop through the day, class after class. The contemporary theories of multiple intelligence such as Gardner's theory, point towards the need for vertical and alternate assignments and activities within the same classroom. This goes back to the need for resource kits and resource rooms within all educational system- school, colleges and universities.

¹³ Children with dyscalculia or acalculia are often able to arrive at the answer of a numerical but not in the process that is expected by the education system. One may find them with the answer scribbled at the back of the answer sheet and at times they get caught and are not able explain that they have not been cheating. Similarly children with SLD are supposed to be made to sit in a place with minimum of distractions. Hence the school principal or counselor may give direction to the examination in-charge to make all the children with SLD sit in a separate room. In may a school they land up being made to sit in the room, which acts as the examination center. Now that room during the examination time has maximum movement and noise. Just because all the teachers are not sensitive to the needs to a SLD child instead of decreasing the extra stimuli, it gets increased manifold. On top of that the subject teacher may skip coming over and providing the requisite instructions, which she/he did to the other student of the class, who are sitting together let along providing any permissible extra support to the child.

One may conclude that a classroom may be made as, 'SLD friendly', as possible, but if there is no, 'SLD friendly teacher', and no, 'SLD friendly administrator' then nothing will happen.

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