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RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF PARENTS AS TEAM MEMBERS IN THE INTERVENTION PROCESS OF CONTINUING REHABILITATION EDUCATION (CRE) IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS BEFORE GOING TO THE MAINSTREAM INCLUSIVE FORM OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Change is the inevitable part of everyone's life because life has to go on. Change is never easy especially when it involves too many people and an entire system. Yet it is an essential part of our lives especially when some innovation is required for influencing a person or society. This can be in the form of education for the handicapped or those with special needs. It is much more effective if started at the elementary level of education. According to the Kothari Commission (1964-66), the first education commission of independent India, observed: "the education of the handicapped children should be an inseparable part of the education system." From this observation came the first concept of Integration into teaching-learning process. Both parents and teachers are equally important in educating the special children and more emphasis given to the role of parents because they know their child from birth onwards till the time they are into schools and can assess them better. The special education means an educational intervention which refers to education of children with disabilities. Usually these are done in special schools outside the institutions of regular schools. Jean Piaget has propagated the theory of Cognitive Development and there are different stages of development of a child from infancy to adulthood. The implications of this theory can be of assistance to special child development as well. At present the new concept of Inclusive education has come about which means creating and planning curriculum within the regular educational settings with normal children. This is supposed to be much more beneficial and at the same time challenging too. Rehabilitation is a comprehensive term which means embracing all within a system. It also means to bring the disabled people back to normal by opportunities and self-help. The Continuing Rehabilitation Education (CRE) is working for providing health care services, social services, education and vocation to different types of disabled people and children. Here our target group are disabled children starting from infants to adults. It further means not only keeping these children in normal conditions but also arresting further disability. Parents can participate as equal partners by realizing the needs of their child and their special abilities. A little effort can make a lot of difference at home itself only with a little awareness. Parents' role is important not only at home but also at school by making their special children able to prepare themselves to receive the education with other children. This paper describes the objectives of Rehabilitation Education, planning of the special education, Parent Involvement and Improved Achievement, Home Environment's Influence on Schooling, Parent control of children, effects of disabilities on families, Communication between parents and school personnel and parents' empowerment.

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INTRODUCTION

All students begin their educational careers with needs. For many, it is the need for guidance by a professional educator who can expand their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. While each student brings a different level of knowledge and skills to his or her class, the individual's needs are typically met by a highly-qualified educator. However, there are children who have unique needs that are typical for children of their age and may not be within the expertise of the general education classroom teacher.

It is during this time that the teacher (or parent, administrator, or counselor) recognizes a consistent need or problem exhibited by the student. The recognition of a discrepancy in the student's academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and/or physical ability and his or her age may signal the need for academic or behavioral supports. Parents who have concerns about their child's speech and language skills may wonder, "How do I obtain speech therapy services for my child?" The purpose of this paper is to help parents understand the special education process, to provide information regarding eligibility requirements, how to get referrals, evaluations, and services.

It is important to note that special education is specifically designed instruction---provided at no cost to the parents---that is set up to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Special education is necessary before entering into the Inclusive form of education. Special education includes speech-language pathology services and other related services as provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States of America. While the term special education includes early intervention services, preschool-based services, and post-high school programs, this paper focuses on services for school-aged children. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal statute that provides guidelines and regulations for how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services. As mentioned above, this Act makes special education services possible. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) follows the guidelines provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Objectives of Rehabilitation: Both parents with support of teachers should first of all know the goals of this form of Education. The facts to be known are:

- To define and explain rehabilitation.
- To identify the components of rehabilitation programme.
- Developing awareness on the role of voluntary agencies for the disabled/ handicapped children .
- Developing competency to assess the various programmes provided by government and non-governmental agencies.

Planning of strategies: The IEP, Individualized Education Program, is a document that is developed for each public school child who is eligible for special education. The IEP is created through a team effort reviewed periodically. In the United States, this program is known as a Individualized Education Program (IEP). In Canada and the United Kingdom, an equivalent document is called an Individual Education System. An IEP is meant to ensure that students receive an appropriate placement, not only special education classrooms or special schools. It is meant to give the student a chance to participate in regular school culture and academics as much as is possible for that individual student. In this way, the student is able to have specialized assistance only when such assistance is absolutely necessary, and otherwise maintains the freedom to interact with and participate in the activities of his or her more general school peers. This gives the child an opportunity to grow and develop according to his or her needs in the special as well as general school environments. Already Inclusive form of education is existing in our country India and if we also add the system of special schooling and then mainstream education similar to this Individualized form the impact of accommodation, adjustment and sense of achievement or achievement motivation will be higher, is felt. In the approach of Inclusive Education, students with special needs spend all, or most of the school day with students who do not have special needs. Because inclusion can require substantial modification of the general curriculum, most schools use it only for selected students with mild to moderate special needs, which is accepted as a best practice. ^{[10][11]} Specialized services may be provided inside or outside the regular classroom, depending on the type of service. Students may occasionally leave the regular classroom to attend smaller, more intensive instructional sessions in a resource room, or to

receive other related services that might require specialized equipment or might be disruptive to the rest of the class, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, rehabilitation counseling. They might also leave the regular classroom for services that require privacy, such as counseling sessions with a social worker. What I think is, if the various strategies are combined in a hierarchical way will be helpful in the personality and skill development of a child. We can involve first exclusion at the base level at homes or outdoors other than schools, then the higher level can be segregation in the same school campus with separate classes of those children trained at homes, they can join the other regular mode students in the lunch or while taking meals. The next higher level of these group of handicapped children can then be shifted to the mainstream where specific time periods are spent in regular classrooms based on the skills and the rest of the school hours in special classrooms.

The highest level being the Inclusive form of class with the regular category of students to gradually erase the social stigma from the minds of these differentially-abled children. But it should be remembered that Inclusive education can be possible only when the disabled child has shown satisfactory outcomes to reach to that level and not just to include them just for the sake of inclusion. Equality should go hand-in-hand with individualization and individual attention also because we cannot forget that they are children with special needs and until special methods and sufficient responsibilities are taken the Inclusion will not bring optimum achievement for these children. Other than this the Group Dynamics or sociometry is also very important. Simply putting them in regular classes may hamper their emotional development and certain inferiority complexes or depression may arise if these special children are not receiving co-operation and affection and attention from his or her peers because as it is classes are full of diverse nature of students and including handicapped children becomes even more challenging for teachers and the entire school. Parents need to study their disabled children and observe very carefully how much they are capable of attending the inclusive classes otherwise special attention is always needed.

In the Individualized Education Program (IEP) the team may be composed of primarily the Parents or legal guardians of the student with a disability, one general education teacher of the student if the student is participating in the regular education environment for any classes, one special education teacher, a representative of the local educational agency(LEA) such as a Principal of the school who is qualified to supervise the needs of the child and is knowledgeable of the general curriculum and the availability of the resources of the agency and has the authority to use these resources, a school psychologist or specially-trained special education teacher who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation, the student himself or herself and other individuals like family members or family friends or related service providers or an advocate who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student or maintaining a close relationship with the student. But it can be well understood that all the team members are pivoted round the parent(s) who are the ones to know the best for their child along with the suggestions of other members.

Advocacy of Parents: Parents need Advocacy centres which can empower them and the professionals in the well-being and educational rights of their children. These centres are there

such as “Ummeed”, Latika Roy Foundation, FIVE (Centre for child development), Childline India Foundation for Child Protection Advocacy. But more of such centres should be organized to work towards this goal by providing information, training, technical assistance, support and the exchange of ideas. And it should be remembered that special commitment is to those children with the greatest need due to disability, poverty, discrimination based on race, sex, or language, or other special needs. If not so, the concept of equalization, Inclusiveness will lose their meaning. Also the centres which already exist should have a goal to enable all children to become fully participating and contributing members of society. The lead role of this multifaceted program is to be carried out by a multilingual and multiracial staff of parents of children with and without disabilities to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Training of Parents and Professionals: Workshops can be organized by the Parent Advocacy Centres to meet the individual and group needs and interests. Though the leaders may belong to multi-lingual and multi-racial backgrounds but the sessions can be organized in a common language or in bilingual form. Parents can form their own organizations. And they alongwith school systems and professional agencies can contact the Advocacy centres for information about how to schedule a workshop in their area. This can be in the form of Global to local level. The free training to parents by these centres can be determined based on the following criteria:

- Geographical Diversity
- Target audience including parents and professionals
- Training open to all members of the community
- Projected attendance of atleast 10 people.
- Topic areas targeted in Parent Training and Information grant.
- Host group providing space, Audio-visual equipment and publicity.
- Host organization is located in an alliance school district.

From such programs the parents of children with disabilities will learn how to become more active participants in their children’s education. The sessions may include information on evaluations, record keeping of day to day learning behavior, Planning and Placement Team meetings, the effective involvement in the development of Individualized Education Program with the help of school agencies to know the key components, developing measurable goals and tips for monitoring a student’s progress and not necessarily meet all the goals within the school term, but they must provide evidence of a “good faith effort” toward achieving the goals. One important thing to be noted here is that team relationships are very important for successful meetings and success in work.

Parental Involvement (Some findings and Quotes): Rich (1987) identified a number of reasons for family involvement in students’ schooling: increased student achievement, promotion of home learning, improved student behavior, family acceptance of children, benefits to parents, teacher acceptance of students, and benefits to the community resulting from increased family involvement. Christenson (1990) used a home rating scale and examined that home environment for students with learning difficulties and disabilities and students with no handicaps was rated

significantly higher than the home environment for students who were emotionally disturbed.

Gandhiji said: “Children inherit the qualities of the parents, no less than their physical features. Environment does play an important part, but the original capital on which a child starts in life is inherited from its ancestors. I have also seen children successfully surmounting the effects of an evil inheritance. That is due to purity being an inherent attribute of the soul.”

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam said: “Behind the parents stands the school, and behind the teacher the home.”

Parental Control: The families are also adversely affected by the abnormal behaviours of their handicapped children so they need to control their children in a positive approach. The parents’ perception is important for bringing about a behavioural change among their children. They have to take proper planning throughout life to rear up their children with all the care and attention to the level required.

Home-school Collaboration: Such a collaboration is advocated by most educators as one way to address problems that the students experience in school. Professionals and parents readily support the notion that it is important to get schools and parents working more closely together. Yet home-school collaboration is not easy, and it does not always work but then both parents and personnels should realize from their own point of views and perspectives if the thoughts do not match. Parental empowerment is the issue for this type of education. Some are reluctant to send their children to schools and also worry about the costs of education for tools of imparting lessons to the special child at school.

Conclusion

Parents are the crucial elements for special education. They should first know the process of education and the process of their child’s development. Keen observation is a necessary component at home and the moral support is always an expectation of any child, be it special or not. Placing their own ideas with the school members and being active participants in this process can bring about a revolution in this field of special education. Apart from this the basic skills of parents like patience, co-operation, care, detailed knowledge of their child and appreciation in every minor yet valuable step by the child at home and school will be a foundation stone for the child’s present and definitely the future.

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