

Interventions for Inclusive Schooling of  
children with Disabilities in DPEP Districts:  
National Conference Report  
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## **Interventions for Inclusive schooling of Children with Disabilities in DPEP Districts: National Conference Report**

The Conference was inaugurated by Shri P.R. Dasgupta, Education Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Welcoming him, Professor A.K. Sharma, Director, NCERT highlighted the importance and need for bringing the disabled child into the fold of elementary education. Professor Sharma stated that the efforts of DPEP would remain incomplete till all children with special needs are attended to by educational agencies whether of the government or of the NGOs. He expressed his sense of satisfaction at the earnest and sincere efforts of the Government of India in this direction and assured all possible academic and technical resource support from the NCERT.

Professor N.K. Ambasht, Head of the Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs, NCERT, highlighted the purpose of the Conference. He briefly alluded to the background paper generated by the Department making a mention of varieties of models reviewed and developed therein, and the possibility of their adoption/adaptation and development according to the needs of the local area. He highlighted the Spiral Capacity Building Model of training and pointed out its advantages in the light of the requirement of large number of trained manpower, recurrent nature, cost effectiveness, etc.

In his introductory remarks, Shri R.S. Pandey, Joint Secretary, MHRD and Bureau Head, DPEP Bureau, highlighted the urgency of the coverage of the disabled child. Out of all such children, he pointed out, only one per cent were being provided schooling whereas to achieve the goals of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) and of Education for All, 100 per cent such children must be enrolled and retained in the school system, whether regular or alternative, formal

or non-formal. He appreciated the comprehensive and thoughtful background paper and congratulated the NCERT for having produced it. He expressed hope that this Conference would be a harbinger of a new deal for the children with impairments. Shri Pandey explained the DPEP structure from village to national levels and urged the Conference to think and suggest as to how special education strategies and structures could be meshed in with those of the DPEP to make it comprehensive, viable and effective.

Inaugurating the conference, Shri PR. Dasgupta stressed the need to converge the support systems of various Ministries like HRD, Health and Family Welfare. For example, the School Health Programme could be effectively integrated with identification and assessment. He further stressed the need for providing early childhood education and care to disabled children so that they were ready to enter the primary schools and continue schooling. He also emphasized that the need for educating disabled children could not be ignored in the programme of 'Education for All' (EFA), and this would be possible only if the disabled children were caught young right at the pre-school stage.

He stated that the Government of India was very keen on making the DPEP a success and expressed satisfaction that the DPEP was proving innovative in nature and as such would certainly succeed in providing integrated education to the disabled children.

He further said that to make inclusive schooling a reality, it would require strong linkages and networking between various Government departments and agencies such as Health and Family Welfare, Women and Child Development, ECCE and NGO's working in DPEP districts. Besides this, training of regular and special resource room teachers was an extremely crucial input for making the integrated education programme a success. The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by Shri CD. Tamboli.

After the inaugural session, the Conference met in a plenary. The participants discussed the general issues. It was emphasised that PIED experimentation and IEDC experiences should be taken advantage of and adapted to the situation wherever applicable. It was also pointed out that the IEDC experiences should be taken advantage of and adapted to the situation wherever applicable. It was also pointed out that the IEDC scheme, which is not being fully utilized in all States, should be linked with DPEP efforts for the benefit of inclusive schooling in DPEP districts. This should be further reinforced by the optional involvement of NGO's at all the levels within the programme. The Conference stressed the need to develop awareness in the community and ensure its involvement in inclusive schooling, particularly at the primary level.

Other important areas of intervention identified were Research and Development and Capacity Building. Finally, it was unanimously agreed that inclusive schooling was important, especially if EFA was to be attained by the turn of the century.

After the plenary session, the participants met separately in five groups as follows:

- Group I Identification and Assessment
- Group II Interventions
- Group III Resource-Room Support
- Group IV Teacher Training
- Group V Structures, Linkages and Monitoring.

The salient recommendations of the Conference are as follows:

### **Identification and Assessment**

Identification of children with impairments even before they enter school is a necessary condition for detecting and locating such children who have to be covered for inclusive schooling at a posterior date as envisaged in the DPEP guidelines. The convergence between elementary education, ECCE, School health, and ICDS etc. could be fruitfully utilized for this purpose. For children already enrolled in school, similar exercise is necessary for obvious reasons. It may be necessary to provide short training to the functionaries of these agencies in the skill of identification through tools and materials developed by various agencies like the NCERT, National Institutes of Handicapped, etc.

Since this task involves census approach a large band of workers needs to be trained. Naturally at the village level the functionaries are the primary school teachers, the ICDS/ECCE & village health workers. All of them need to be covered under the training programme. Identification is just a preliminary bench mark to plan strategies for education coverage, extension of specialized services and remediation if possible. Therefore, the extent of impairment needs to be assessed.

Two types of Assessment are visualized: Functional and Formal. The first type of assessment can be done by the primary school teachers who can then refer children for formal assessment to the district level, which falls in tune with the DPEP structure as envisaged in DPEP structure guidelines. For the second type however, a group of specialists comprising of doctor, psychologist, pediatrician, ENT/Eye, Orthopaedic specialist, and others would be required for purposes of medical and psycho-educational testing of identified children.

Training in regional language is a necessary input required to prepare teachers for functional assessment. Tools developed by the

NCERT and other National Institutes could be used. Periodical assessment is crucial in order to facilitate effective teaching learning within Primary Schools.

Immediate feed back of the formal assessment should be communicated to the concerned resource room teacher and class teacher for develop individualized educational plans.

### Interventions

As mentioned above, the need for coordinated intervention should be possible through existing DPEP structures. Needless to emphasize, interventions at the pre-school stage are as important as in-school interventions. Whereas enrolment of all children is the DPEP goal, it is essential to remind ourselves that enrolment, retention and achievement are intrinsically related to all children including children with impairment/disability. Therefore, there is a special need to make educational functionaries not only aware but conscious about special efforts required to bring all such children in the fold of inclusive education.

The Conference felt that there should be a greater emphasis on bringing out the latent potential of children with impairments and their interactive nature with environmental resources should be recognized in planning any strategy aimed at ameliorating the needs of these children. The Conference also felt that these children cannot be denied education for want of resources whether manpower, material or financial. With technological development, it is possible to acquire various kinds of aids suitable for different types of disabilities, single or multiple. This should not be given a back seat for want of funds. At the same time, it was recognized that there is a great need for research and development activities - both hardware and software.

Specific interventions for children with impairments can be classified into pre-educational/preparatory and educational.

Pre-educational services, for example orientation, mobility and daily living skills, are considered as absolutely necessary to prepare the child for inclusive schooling. This would require interventions for ensuring an integrated service delivery system involving ICDS, ECCE, WCD and other agencies available at the grass root level besides family and community members. This has been categorically emphasised in the DPEP guidelines.

Adequate inputs in terms of media awareness programmes, aids and appliances, allowances, guidance and counselling and rehabilitation services would not only serve to prepare but facilitate effective integration of the impaired child into primary schools.

Removal of architectural barriers is a basic prerequisite so as to

provide access to all children with disabilities. Provision of transport and physical assistance are also envisaged as crucial inputs to maximize their attendance and participation in primary schools.

The educational interventions could be considered in terms of introduction of a plus curriculum for children with differentiated needs. Curricular adaptations, teaching-learning materials and strategies and training for optional and appropriate use of teaching aids is of equal importance in the context of teaching a disabled child.

This implies intensive curriculum research and development in terms of objectives for achievement of given Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) competencies, adaptation of instructional material, teaching-learning processes, assessment and evaluation techniques according to the specific needs of each impaired child.

In addition, as envisaged in recent Persons with Disabilities (equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation) Act, each disabled child has to be provided free of cost reading materials adapted to suit his/her special needs.

While it is necessary to provide inputs in educational activities, it is also necessary that children with impairments are provided special services like physiotherapy, speech therapy etc. for which DPEP structures will have to link up with agencies providing these services. The *modus operandi* to put such a programme into action at the door step of each child could be considered by providing mobile support units.

It is realized that vocationalisation of education is not possible at the primary stage because of policy imperatives. At the same time it is felt necessary that work experience activities may be introduced and adapted to suit the specific needs of the impaired child.

### **Resource Room Support**

Resource room support is central to the success of inclusive schooling.

The four models mentioned in the background and issue paper namely Block Resource model, Peripatetic model, NGO supported Resource model and Cluster Resource model have their utility. Any or a combination of these could be considered in various geographical and DPEP structural contexts. In order to keep the spirit of flexibility and local relevance as the prime concern the Conference felt that it would be in the interest of the programme to keep applicability of these models according to the local needs. Depending on the need of the area, any one model singly or in combination with others can be selected. However, transportation facility is a must irrespective of the model selected by district/block. The ultimate goal is that Resource room facilities should be available to all children who need it.

Obviously the person who manages the resource rooms should have proper training in dealing with various kinds of impairments, single or multiple.

The function of the Resource room teacher could be:

- Special educational assessment with the help of para medical team, NGOs, VEC members, Panchayat members and other administrators.
- Development of special teaching learning materials and aids.
- Planning individualised instructions.
- Meeting the counselling and guidance needs of the child and the family.
- Monitoring and operating the aids and equipment.
- Providing forum for exchange of ideas and teaching strategies.
- Organize remedial interventions.

The overall coordination of the resource room should be the responsibility of a special coordinator at the district level as envisaged in the structures discussed later in this report.

Aids and appliances which form an intrinsic part of the support services at the resource room could be as per the lists given in the appendix of the background paper developed by the NCERT.

### Teacher Training

The Conference felt that no single straight jacket model can be visualized for training of the personnel because of the local specific character of the DPEP. Yet, it is necessary that every functionary connected with education must have proper attitude and appreciation of the need of the disabled including the primary school teachers. For this, short term training programmes could be devised which may include awareness, appreciation of the child's needs, counselling, curriculum adaptation, simple techniques of identification and functional assessment, handling of children with single and multiple disabilities, amongst other aspects that might be considered necessary. It may be considered worthwhile to integrate these components with the general training programme of the primary school teachers in the DPEP districts. Since it is proposed to integrate these components with the general training, the modalities are not being separately suggested.

Special educational services to such impaired children are of prime importance and, therefore, a support system for the primary school teachers to function effectively is envisaged. In this connection the existing models of PIED and the proposed model of the 'Spiral Capacity Building' may be considered for adoption/adaptation by the

concerned districts as per their requirements. It needs to be underscored that these are not the only models or are sacrosanct but it is necessary to note that the need for such trained manpower is absolutely essential.

Each DPEP district could consider the structure and organisational pattern of the training programme in the light of their own specific structure and possible linkages taking cognizance of available trained manpower and projected manpower needs.

It may be worthwhile to review the existing training programmes and adapt it to the local needs and environment. The proposed Spatial Capacity Building model described in the background paper could also be considered in the context of local needs of manpower requirements, available resources, time frame, cost effectiveness, etc.

### Linkages, Structures and Monitoring

The first level of operation envisaged under the interventions is of the Child and Family, Community. For this, linkages need to be established with the existing structure of Village Education Committee (VEC) as envisaged in POA (1992) and DPEP. It may be worthwhile to mention that the Gram Sabha could also be involved in the process although it is imperative that involvement of VEC implies involvement of Gram Sabha. This is necessary in view of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

At the second level of operation Child Welfare and Rehabilitation Services available in the Panchayat Samiti/Village through the Health and Family Welfare Programme, WCD agencies, Rural Development and ECCE need to be harnessed and dovetailed at the Child-Family-Community level.

The third level at which the programme should operate is the Primary Teacher-Primary School. The teacher training as indicated above could be effected through the mode opted for by the DPEP in the concerned district. However, linkages with the resource teacher (at the cluster/block, Panchayat Samiti or any other such level decided by DPEP) and the VEC, Parents, Mother-teacher Counsel, Mahila Mandals and alternative schooling system operating in the village like NFE, pre school infrastructures will have to be established and networking ensured.

It is envisaged that the fourth level will consist of a cluster resource room, in case the DPEP has a Cluster Resource Centre (CRC). A trained multicategory teacher should be made available if this exists. The Resource room could be a part of CRC. It is expected that at the cluster level consisting of 8-10 villages, there will be Panchayat Samiti as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which would imply that the networking between the Panchayat Samiti, Cluster Resource room

would be necessary.

The fifth level, that is the Block Resource Centre (BRC), as envisaged in the scheme of operations connected with the inclusive schooling of the disabled child, is a crucial level for organizing training if Spiral Capacity Building model is to be adopted. In any case, close linkages between the Block Samiti, BRC and paramedical/medical team as well as the trainers or resource persons will have to be developed. These would in turn draw expert advice from the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETS) and referral centres for different kinds of disabilities at the district level.

The district unit of the DPEP should acquire total responsibility of implementation of this component and may devise methods and means of establishing a District Resource Group (DRG) as an integral part of the District Resource Centre. This resource centre will have to establish linkages with the district hospitals, special schools and medical experts specializing in different kinds of disabilities in order to become a comprehensive and functional Resource Centre. The regular functioning of this Resource Centre is of extreme importance and its function would include awareness generation, advocacy, liaison, coordination, production and distribution of materials, training, monitoring and evaluation and consolidating the needs of each village, cluster, block, in the form of district plans. The DRC will be the prime mover of the entire scheme and, therefore, it needs to have experts in different areas either pooled from various agencies or appointed if necessary. It would be advisable to link the DRC with the existing DIETs keeping in view the nature of functions it has to provide.

Looking at the dimensions of the work involved and path breaking that needs to be undertaken, DPEP may consider nominating/appointing a senior and experienced person in this area as Project Incharge Special Education, like that of Officer Incharge Girls Education.

Deriving from the nature of support that the district requires, the State will have to build a State Resource Group (SRG). This State Resource Group will function in close coordination with the State Project Director. It would ensure uninterrupted supportive mechanisms through the Project Director, undertake monitoring and evaluation work, provide training at the State and district levels, establish network with NGOs, organize mass media campaigns at the State level and perform clearing house functions in the shape of documentation. In case the State decides to locate this group in SCERT or wherever IEDC Cells are located it would be advantageous. However, if this is not possible, even then the need of establishing



strong linkages with concerned SCERTs cannot be over emphasized.

At the national level, the DPEP Bureau may establish a National Resource Group (NRG) on special education. Looking at the resources and the expertise available at the NCERT it may be advisable to locate this National Resource Group in the Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs. It may have other experts from outside the department and the Council depending on the requirement of specializations.

It is also felt necessary to co-opt all the Directors of the National Institutes as members of this National Resource Group. The Ministry of Welfare, Health and Family Welfare, Department of Women and Child Development besides the Department of Education should also find representation in the NRG.

The NRG will undertake research and development activity, monitoring and evaluation function inter-institutional coordination and policy planning.