

## Capacity building and awareness creation on Learning Disabilities- SSA Chandigarh

Bringing students with disabilities into general education classrooms should result in true, long-term acceptance. How inclusion happens varies with every school. The approaches range from including students with disability on every level with no separation to maintaining self-contained classrooms with only periodic mingling of students.

The ideal system of inclusion is that the general education system itself should made education of children with disabilities as its integral part. This means that the general classroom teachers are to be equipped with skills to address the educational needs of children with disabilities with bare minimum support of Resource Teacher(special teacher) and there is no recipe for becoming an inclusive teacher. Inclusion is just good teaching practices and a teacher sets the stage for learning with appropriate classroom management to meet needs of children with challenges.

The school experiences of students with disabilities can be positively or negatively influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of students and staff and by school policies. One has to take the lead in assessing school climate in relation to students with disabilities and initiating interventions or advocating for change when appropriate.

In UT Chandigarh before 2006, whenever some parent of a child with disability approaches the school, the authorities used to say:

“Yeh school en bacha okeliyenahinhai, inhae inke school main le jao.

(This school is not meant for these kids, take them to special school)”

The problem was even worse for parents of children with learning disabilities as because of lack of awareness amongst both parents and school authorities they always used to blame the child for not performing in studies without knowing the fact that the child may be with special needs and require specifically designed curriculum or teaching strategies. During first sensitization session with teachers on various disabilities including learning disabilities, the response after hearing the characteristics of Learning disability was that approximately 90 % students of my class are learning disabled. Similarly, while interacting with parents, they reported that their ward is good for nothing as he/she is not performing in studies and at times they started planning for withdrawing their wards from school. This act was against the aim of SSA and thus it leads to

planning of extensive awareness-cum-capacity building programmes for both parents and teachers.

### **Steps taken to create awareness about learning disabilities**

- Orientation of School Principals:

School Principal being head of the institution play an important role as any activity in the school can be organized only with their support & cooperation. Accordingly, the schools Principals were given orientation about concept of learning disabilities. Along with this they were briefed that there is no special school for children with learning disabilities and the child is diagnosed to be having learning disability once he/ she enters grade III and the child can perform well if given proper learning environment and teaching strategies.

- Orientation of Cluster Resource Center Coordinators:

Chandigarh is a single district UT with no blocks, however, whole city has been divided into 20 clusters and the CRCCs of the clusters act as important link between state and schools. Thus, all the 20 CRCCs were imparted training on the concept of Learning disabilities and how the teacher can identify & handle such students in the class. This training further helped in handholding of general education teachers in the inclusive classrooms.

- Capacity building programmes of General Education Teachers:

It is foremost important to orient/train teachers about innovative teaching strategies & curricular adaptations to meet the learning needs of all children in the class as general orientation is not enough. As such no. of training programmes was conducted in different years for training of teachers to handle children with learning disabilities. Capacity building programmes are being conducted in different manners at different levels. The details of such programmes are as under:

1. Group discussions:- In order to address various problems being encountered by class/subject teachers, monthly discussions are being undertaken in each school under the supervision of CRCCs and Resource Teachers guide them as and when required. This type of sharing help in solving various issues and acts as good platform for sharing various best practices. These discussions help in identifying the hard spots and the needs of the training programmes.

2. Cluster Level Academic Meets: - In order to train more teachers on inclusive strategies and general sensitization 02 days cluster level meets are being organized for both primary and upper primary teachers. The main focus of these cluster level meets was orientation about screening, identification & assessment of children with learning disabilities, inclusive classroom strategies and classroom management. The details of cluster level meets being undertaken are as below:-

3. In-service teacher training: General education teachers undergo regular training programmes for making them aware about the changes in the education setup and polishing/enhancing their teaching abilities. It has been made mandatory to devote minimum 02-03 days on different concepts of IE specifically LD. Accordingly the general education teachers were sensitized about different concepts of learning disabilities & how different



remediation/ educational strategies can be used for better inclusion of such children in class, behaviour modifications & other needs.

4. 03-05 days training programmes on Learning disabilities for general education teachers: These training programmes were designed keeping in mind the needs of teachers and to make them aware about the latest developments in the field of disabilities. At least one teacher from each school, probably the one who has done foundation course on disabilities was selected for these type of training programmes. These teachers were trained through different training programmes on learning disabilities in a phased manner.

✓ 1<sup>st</sup> phase of training was general orientation about learning disability which includes concept, characteristics, screening, identification and assessment of children having LD.

✓ 2<sup>nd</sup> phase was classroom management and inclusive teaching strategies.

✓ 3<sup>rd</sup> phase was remediation and educational planning for CWLD in inclusive setup.

- ✓ 4<sup>th</sup> phase was curriculum adaptations and development of inclusive teaching plans, this phase was conducted in a workshop mode where teachers develop inclusive teaching plans with its relevant teaching learning material.
- ✓ 5<sup>th</sup> phase will be planned in 2016-17 which will be follow up of the previous training programmes.

The details of various Cluster Level Academic meets and training programmes organized for Learning Disabilities are as under:

Sr. No.	Year	No. of teachers covered	Topics covered
1	2007-08	84	03 days orientation on learning disabilities
2	2008-09	993	General orientation on disabilities which includes learning disabilities
3	2008-09	18	30 days training with focus on Introduction about learning disability, various assessment and counseling techniques, remediation process for LD children.
4	2009-10	41	
5	2010-11	703	General orientation on disabilities which includes learning disabilities
6	2011-12	83	Teaching strategies for children with Learning Disability in inclusive set up
7	2012-13	93	
8	2013-14	546	Newly inducted teachers were given orientation about the concept of learning disabilities.
9	2014-15	85	Curriculum adaptations of children with learning disabilities.
10	2015-16	97	Curriculum adaptations of children with learning disabilities & use of ICT.
11	2016-17	80	Curriculum adaptations at primary and Upper-primary level

- Talks/Training of parents and community members:

Awareness about disabilities cannot be generated until and unless the community and parents of CWSN interact together and discuss the myths and facts about disabilities. Learning disability is such an issue which requires lot of discussions and there was a need to make them aware about the differentiation between learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Further it was utmost important



that community members become aware about the needs of such children for better rehabilitation. Keeping this fact in mind various training programmes for both community and parents were organized in different years.

- Convergence with different institutes/ organizations having experts in LD:

Availability of local resources is an important aspect in planning any of the above activities. As such in order to develop a resource group for learning disabilities, a group of experts in the area of LD from various local institutes have been constituted. The details of various institutions working in the field of LD are as under:

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Institute</b>	<b>Area of work</b>
<b>1</b>	Panjab University (Dept. of Disability studies and Education)	Training programmes
<b>2</b>	Paryaas Rehabilitation Center	Assessment, training and remediation
<b>3</b>	Govt. Rehabilitation Institute for Intellectual Disabilities	Assessment & training

Along with this, experts from local colleges of education, NGO also contribute in the training programmes of Learning Disabilities.

As a result of all these efforts, following developments have taken place in UT Chandigarh in the area if learning disability or Inclusive education:

- School teachers are now sensitized towards the needs of Children with learning disabilities.
- No child with disability is denied admission in the Govt. schools of Chandigarh.
- A group of school level resource persons have been formed as a result of these trainings.