

The Role of the Principal as a Moral Imperative: Case Study of an Inclusive School in Pakistan

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Abstract: This paper, presents the findings of a small scale qualitative case study of an inclusive school in Pakistan. The study focused on the role of the principal, as a moral imperative, in transforming a mainstream school to reach out to all learners through Inclusive Education (IE).

The philosophy of inclusive education is derived from the principle of Education as a Human Right, therefore giving it a moral outlook grounded in the value for human dignity. Inclusive Education means that mainstream schools admit all children irrespective of their abilities and individual social, physical and economic differences. In the absence of enabling legislation for implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) in most of the developing countries (Eleweke & Jonah, 2000), IE remains a matter of the choice of individual schools and principal as the “moral imperative of the school”, (Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni 1992). Findings of this study revealed that the role of the principal of an Inclusive School is not only to facilitate the restructuring of the school and curricula, but also to appeal to the stakeholders’ emotions and feelings in order to change their attitudes and perceptions about the right and ability of individual children to belong to the school. The principal also serves as a model and reinforces values such as: right to admission for all, quality education for all, equal participation through flexible teaching and learning activities, academic support, belongingness, care, respect, acceptance and tolerance. All these portray characteristics that serve as a starting point for school improvement and effectiveness as well as good leadership in schools. Previous research conducted in Pakistan schools revealed that students’ academic perspectives were interrelated with their social and moral perceptions to the extent that if they did not perform academically well, their moral and social behavior was also equally affected (Vazir, 2004). This shows that there is a clear relationship between academic achievement, and social and moral perspectives. However, principals perceive their roles first and foremost as academic leaders and then as moral practitioners. Hence, this study opens doorways for an educational dialogue to conceptualize the new role for principals.

Key words: inclusive education, social and moral values, new role of principal

Introduction

Reforms towards mainstreaming of Special Needs Education (SEN) as a means of achieving universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015 currently appear to be a major agenda on the global forums on the Rights of the Child and other Education Reforms. The weight of these reforms therefore cause major challenges to individual schools and its leadership as schools are called expected to admit children previously belonged to aq different category of schools according to their disabilities.

At the heart of these changes is a call to the schools to accept children with special needs such as those with disabilities, orphans, refugees, those previously marginalized for gender reasons, those in child labor and many other categories depending on the context. Of these categories of marginalized groups, children with disabilities remain the largest category of students not receiving formal schooling, (UNESCO, 1998). For this purpose, policies and practices on admission, curriculum implementation and assessment need to be changed to become more holistic and child centered. Greater collaboration with the parents and community is also required. Inclusive Education, if well implemented, is the starting point of school improvement, (UNESCO, 2005). Ainscow (2005) challenges the advocates of school improvement and effectiveness to consider how their work takes into account the learning of all children. No doubt implementation of IE in mainstream schools as a major change and reform process directly involves school leadership. Hence, Leithwood et al, (1996) say that “If schools are expected to behave differently, then leaders must also behave differently” (p. 204).

While principals in the developing countries are being called upon to respond to these initiatives and challenges associated with mainstreaming of IE, it is quite apparent that most of them do not have the autonomy to do so. As Oplatka (2004) points out, the principals’ power in most of the developing countries is “severely limited by the rules of the system” (p. 430) because educational systems in these countries are highly centralized, the autonomy of the principal is constrained. This means that in cases where a principal may be driven by personal values to admit SEN children in the school, she/he is likely to encounter certain barriers in the policies that guide admission. According to

Research, the role definition of principalship in Pakistan, just as in a few other developing countries in Africa such as Kenya, south Africa, Botswana and Ghana; is limited to administrative functions rather than a means to improve students achievements for the development of the specific nations.(Memon & Bana,2004; Simkins et al, 2004; Oplatka,2004). Oplatka further explains that principals also experience shortages of qualified teachers, scarcity of material resources and lack of adequate funds to run the schools, therefore head teachers, instead devote most of their time to mobilizing the parents and the community to raise funds to run the schools. This may be a constraining factor because this leaves headteachers with little time for personal professional development and reflective practice with the teachers. Where adapted teaching and learning resources for teacher are required, then funds would be a constraining factor as well.

The other constraints noted in the Pakistan context and other developing countries is that the national curriculum, syllabus, learning and teaching materials, and examinations, staffing, recruitment of teachers for professional development and funding are all centralized (Simkins, et al.; 1998, Kitavi & Westhuizen (1997) cited in Oplatka (2004) Memon & Bana, 2004). Yet, the success of inclusive education depends on the ability of principals and schools to adapt curricula, assessments and other learning and teaching materials to address diverse needs of students within specific school contexts. Centralization of academic programs makes it impossible for this to happen. Ainscow (1999) argues that the idea that there is a single national perspective on matters to do with education, and the fact that educational practice is generalized across countries without attention to local contexts, is a major “pitfall” (p. 13).

Given this kind of a scene, it is most likely that where reforms that require profound restructuring additional funds to educate learners with special needs are concerned, principals, unless driven by a strong moral imperative are likely to play it safe until guiding policies are enacted by the governments.

The Research Problem

The policy of inclusive education is derived from the Salamanca Statement on the principles, policy and practice in special needs education that was signed by 92

governments and 25 international organizations in 1994. (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca statement was further reinforced by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which was ratified by 187 countries. As a result, Governments were required to review and revise their policies. They must reflect an inclusive approach in practice and make special provisions for children with disabilities to be fully included in all aspects of life.

Since then, the number of signatory countries have increased over the years yet, at present, most of the countries in the developing world have not yet realized this commitment. Some of the reasons given for this slow progress towards inclusion include:

- Community attitudes and beliefs towards people with Special Education Needs (SEN) that have not changed.. it is still widely believed that they are different therefore should be treated differently within institutions that have been developed specifically for them.
- Teachers believe that they are not qualified to handle children with special needs
- School structures and systems (including curricula) are not designed to benefit SEN children.
- Teachers and parents believe SEN children are better off in special schools under special teachers and specialized instructions.
- School leaders do not have inclusive views about SEN children.
- School leaders, especially principals, are fearful of implementing supposedly untested ideas where pupils are concerned. They would like IE to be proved as workable before they can implement in their schools

While the above reasons may have some truth in them, some schools have been able to an extent, implement IE policies.

The current situation in most of the schools is that children with special needs are being denied admission in mainstream schools. In cases where they are admitted, most of them usually end up dropping out, or transferring to special schools before they complete the primary level of education because most of the schools do not use teaching

and learning methodologies aimed at meeting individual needs.

Most of the special schools have failed to meet the academic needs of the SEN children as special schools are sometimes seen as confines of children who are already deficit who should be modeled towards stereotyped careers through vocational training in carpentry, painting, tailoring and other 'blue collar' careers as opposed to white collar jobs.

The curriculum and assessment procedures in most of the schools in the developing countries are standardized; having been developed without considering the diverse needs of the students (UNESCO, 1998) As a result children with SEN emerge out of the schools with very minimum academic achievements. Moreover, most of the schools have not given a serious thought to including education for all children in their school development plans in order to make it legitimate for the schools and teachers to make the necessary changes aimed at including all learners. Schools fail to plan for the necessary restructuring in order to provided adequate professional development for their teachers to effectively engage learners with diverse needs and abilities. Relevant teaching and learning materials have are also not been provided, either by the education ministries or the individual schools. In the same vein, schools are being built with the assumptions that all staff and children or even visitors who come to the school will not have any special needs,. For example, there are no provisions for wheel chairs users in most of the institutions hence pupils who are physically challenged are unlikely to access some buildings in educational institutions

Significance of the Study

According to the Salamanca Statement, education is a basic human right and all learners have a right to education regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties, (UNESCO, 2001). Inclusive education is not just about children with disabilities, but also includes other focus groups perceived as marginalized, such as children living in poverty, refugees, minority ethnic groups, and in some communities, girls, (UNESCO, 2003), and HIV/AIDS orphans who currently form a large proportion of school aged children in developing countries

It is therefore evident that every school has a significant proportion of students

of diverse needs given the general, common understanding that every human being is different from the other. Therefore Teacher Education and schools should be prepared to educate students of diverse and specific needs. It is a global phenomenon too, that families are less stable nowadays and that traditional institutions which supported the upbringing of the children have since disintegrated, (Sergiovanni, 1998). In this perspective therefore, Sergiovanni further says that there is need for schools to change their roles from learning organizations to learning communities, where care and sense of belonging has to be cultivated in an environment where teachers practice together to meet the diverse needs of the students. One of the important reasons for this study is to point out that there are apparent reasons for schools to change and develop inclusive policies in order to meet the needs of the students.

Chale (2002), Khamis (2003) and Kramer-Roy (2004) pointed out that schools lacked clear policies on restructuring of learning environments, resource allocation and teacher professional development. They recommended that greater support from school administration would yield better results. Kramer-Roy (2004) further pointed out that there is very little that teachers can achieve at the classroom level without the support of the school management.

It is with these prior findings that we pursued the study in the area of the role of the school management, specifically the principal, in transforming schools to accommodate all learners effectively.

On the professional level, we hope that the findings of this research will help policy makers and other educationists and in advising and guiding schools on strategic planning for the implementation of change reforms in inclusive education. Finally, we hope that this research will add to the growing literature in the area of IE from the perspective of the developing world.

Research Questions

What is the role of the Principal in transforming a school to reach out to all learners through Inclusive Education?

Subsidiary questions:

- What is the principal's understanding about including children with special needs in mainstream schools and how does this opinion influence her/his ability to implement inclusive education in the school?
- In what ways does the principal influence the enrollment and retention of children with special needs?
- How does the principal facilitate teachers responding se to the academic and social needs of SEN children in their classrooms?
- How does the principal inform the planning of curriculum and assessment practices so as to develop the potential of all children especially those with SEN?
- How does the Principal use the IE philosophy to identify and attempt to reduce barriers to inclusive practices in the school?

The Principal as a Moral Imperative

Moral leadership is identified by Leithwood et al. (1999), from a review of a wide range of literature on leadership, as one of the six concepts or models of leadership. The other five types of leadership identified are Instructional, Transformational, Participative, Managerial and Contingent.

Sergiovanni (1992) defines moral imperative as "what is good" (p. 104). Sergiovanni continues to say that there is a very strong connection between duty and what is good; and that the duty to perform certain tasks is usually influenced or motivated by good will to do so. Similar views are shared by Leithwood, et al. (1999) who say that moral leadership assumes that forms of leadership ought to be based on the values of and ethics of leaders themselves and that authority and influence are usually derived on what is generally perceived as right or good.

Both Sergiovanni (1992) and Leithwood et al (1999), identify values as key factors in moral leadership. Leithwood, et al., (1999) drawing from a wide range of literature review on moral leadership identifies the following factors attributed to moral leadership, which from the authors point of view could serve as strategies of moral leadership:

- Moral leadership develops and uses certain values to justify preferred action in order to influence, support and to guide organizational values
- Leaders may draw on people's feeling and emotions to increase their sensitivity and gain support on the legitimacy of the reform processes.
- Moral leadership may use a set of established values, or policies to justify their choices based on the consensus among those affected by the innovation
- Moral leadership may refer to the future consequences of a change as being desirable in this case, if it is a school, to gain support from the teachers, parents, pupils and the community members

Sergiovanni (1992) agrees that values form the core base of moral imperatives of leadership; he asserts that, "the heart of the school is its covenant of shared values" (p.110). The author identifies the following characteristics which he believes should be included in the covenant of a virtuous school. In an inclusive school, the core Value would be the common belief that all children are equal (although different) and should be accorded equal opportunity to quality Education. In our research we perceived a virtuous school as an effective school, one which:

- Helps students reach their full potential, by encouraging the learning community to engage in inquiry, and reflection;
- Believes every student can learn and does everything to make sure that all children do learn;
- Views obstacles to learning as problems to be solved rather than conditions to be solved.
- Attends to the holistic needs of the child with emphasis on the developmental aspects of their physical and social needs.
- Views the ethic of caring as the key to academic success. The caring aspect places teachers and administrators as servants who take care of the students, parents and teachers needs.

- Views parents, teachers, community and the school are partners, with obligation to support and assist for mutual benefit of all.
- Encourages respect for teachers as knowledgeable professionals who should have input and be able to share their personal visions of teaching.
- Promote a pattern of mutual respect between and among teachers and students, therefore resulting in self respect of all involved.

Our research, being inclusive in nature, we decided to link the characteristics of a virtuous school (Sergiovanni, 1992), in this case an effective school, with the characteristics of moral leadership, (Leithwood et al 1999) which we called strategies, in order to reinforce the values of IE in mainstream schools. The expected result would be an effective school where quality education for all is one of the major imperatives, modeled by the principal right down to the most junior member of the school community. The following are the values of Inclusive Education:

- Everyone has a right to education
- All children can learn irrespective of their differences
- Everyone needs their learning supported
- Everyone has difficulties in learning in certain areas at certain times
- Teachers should not be isolated, they need ongoing support
- Discriminatory attitude and behavior should be challenged
- Difference is valuable, it is normal and it enriches society
- Learning can be enhanced through cooperation with teachers, parents and community.

The values of IE were adopted and modified from UNESCO (1999).

The above values of IE seem to have a moral basis in justifying why schools must admit and teach all children irrespective of their individual differences. Hence, a strong link between the values of IE and the values of moral leadership as in Sergiovanni (1992) and Leithwood, et al (1999) Once values are internalized at the level of schools

managers, it is likely to be easier for the teachers to adopt the same. Ainscow (2005) points out that teachers have more skills than they use in their classes, unless otherwise facilitated, while Vazir (2004) says that teachers are usually ethical, it is the principals who curtail them from exercising their moral authority in class by emphasizing on the use of rigid traditional instructional methodologies. As a result some teachers fear bringing about desirable changes that would suit the diverse needs of their learners due to constant admonitions from their supervisors.

Design and Methodology

We conducted a qualitative case study in a private school on the role of the principal in transforming mainstream schools to admit and offer quality education to all learners. It is accepted that qualitative research approaches are suitable in special education because they allow the researcher to “do intensive and detailed study of either one individual or a group as an entity thereby giving a richer contextualized picture of the phenomenon under study”, (Mertens & McLaughlin 2004, p. 97)

Setting and Location

The study was conducted in one of the inclusive private schools in Karachi, Pakistan called Baraka¹. There are quite a few schools that have taken up inclusive education, but the criteria that we used to select this particular school is that it had made significant progress towards inclusion as compared to the others. The other reason for choosing the school was instruction is in English, enabling one of the researchers whose native language is English to easily communicate with the research participants without interpretation. The principal of the school was an ardent advocate of Inclusive Education in educational forums, therefore we set out to find out whether her role had in any way contributed to the successful inclusion of learners with Special needs in that school

¹ Baraka is a pseudonym for the private school in Karachi where we conducted our research

Sample and Sampling Procedure

We used purposeful sampling in determining who the research participants would be. We interviewed the principal as the principal participant. We also observed and interviewed a focus group of 4 teachers, 6 students (3 with disabilities and 3 without disabilities) 6 parents (3 of children with and 3 of children without disabilities). We kept the number relatively small in order to have a manageable amount of data which we could analyze in depth. At the same time we used multiple participants for the purposes of credibility and triangulation while analyzing the data.

Data Collection Tools

We used three of the most commonly accepted methodologies in qualitative research namely, interview, observation and documents review.

Interview: Interview was the main data collection tool. We conducted semi-structured interviews with the principal, a focus group of four teachers, a focus group of six parents and a focus group of six students. We used open-ended questions so as ‘to allow the participants to control the direction of the interview or to end the interview if they felt uncomfortable’ (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

Observation: We observed lessons, school assemblies, students during breaks and co-curricular activities as well as the physical facilities to determine their suitability for children with SEN.

Documents Review

The following documents were reviewed in order to gain insight into the operations of the principal in her daily management of the school:

- Curriculum materials- to see how they have been adopted to suit learners with special needs.
- School admission register-s to get information on admissions, retention, and drop out. If there are any drop outs it would be necessary to find out why.
- Written communication to parents, school magazines, brochures- to see how the principal communicates the school philosophy of IE.

- Posters, leaflets and displays- to see if and how they reflect a mission to offer IE

Data Analysis

Since most of the data was generated through interviews we preferred to use Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) and Wellington (2000) guidelines for the qualitative analysis of research data interchangeably as follows:

- ***Familiarity with transcription:*** The first stage was to transcribe the tape recorded data and to write detailed observation notes after every field work. We numbered every sentence as we transcribed the data. The numbering proved useful later in the last stage of analysis because it became easy for us to notice overlaps and therefore quite easy to merge related categories in order to come up with major themes. we then engaged in reading and re reading of all the transcribed data so as to take note of some of the features which we may have missed out such as pauses, silences and emphasis. This made us familiar with the information we had collected to the extent that we could actually remember off head what each person said or did. This stage is similar to what Wellington (2000) calls ‘the immersion stage’, which he says gives the researcher an “overall sense or feel of data” (p.135).
- ***Appreciating time limits:*** We allocated enough time for reading and re-reading the interviews and writing reflective memos and notes taken in the field. we did this through on-going analysis of data and by restricting ourselves to only two visits per week to allow time to review the data, as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) advice that it is better to analyze a few interviews well than a large number badly.
- ***Description and Analysis:*** We read through the transcripts and tried to get meaning out of every sentence and how they are related to the IE practices and role of the principal. we highlighted the sentences or words that we felt, carried great weight.
- ***Isolating general units of meaning:*** As we went through my notes, we made meaning out of the highlighted utterances and responses and made analytical

notes on the columns. It is at this stage that we started creating categories so as to start making sense of the data.

- ***Relating general units of meaning to the research focus:*** After extracting certain meanings and explanations from each transcript, we compared them with the main and sub research questions so as to determine their relevance. Having used semi structured questions, we found a lot of data which was out of focus, especially from the Parents' interviews. It is at this stage that we embarked on prioritizing the themes. However, we were very careful not to leave out most of the data.
- ***Extracting patterns and themes.*** At this stage, I did a comparative analysis across the board, of all our data, identified the major themes and related the themes to the research questions. We also reflected and re analyzed in relation to our literature review. We then moved to the next stage of triangulation and validity checks.
- ***Validity checks and triangulation:*** we had used multiple sources of data collection for triangulation purposes. We therefore compared all the emerging themes generated from all the research tools and respondents to identify concurrent themes. We awarded 'stars' to themes that appeared to be prominent across the board. we took note of irregularities and marked them in red. It was at this stage that we re-interviewed the principal for clarification of issues which needed further investigation. We also re-analyzed my data in order to capture any facts that we could have missed out. Before we embarked on the final thesis writing, we discussed my tentative findings with the principal and my supervisor in order to ensure that the data was valid.

Ethical Issues

Researchers in Special Needs are required to follow appropriate ethical issues that protect the rights of the participants in the study. It has been established that when research participants are people with disabilities, they have a high degree of vulnerability. Precautions should be taken to protect them from risk and the researcher must consult with experts or members of the community to determine appropriate strategies (Mertens

& McLaughlin 2004). We held a discussion with the school's principal and deputy principal about our research strategies on the first day of our research in order to ensure that the methods we were going to use would not go against the principles of the school and would not also be offensive to the parents and the students. Just like any other research, we had to observe issues of confidentiality and anonymity. We also sought written consent from all participants. We avoided categorization and labeling individuals as disabled and observed the use of sensitive language, so as not to appear insubordinating participants with disabilities, offensive or as having negative assumptions about people with SEN (Mertens 1998; Cook & Fonow 1990 cited in Mertens and McLaughlin 2004).

Limitations

This was a small scale case study research conducted in a private called Baraka school that had made significant advancement towards inclusion of children with disabilities. The number of inclusive schools in Karachi was still very small. Apart from Baraka school where we conducted our research, we were only aware of two other schools where some significant level of inclusion was taking place.

Findings

We used three main tools namely interview, observations and documents review to collect our data for this study. We progressively interpreted and analyzed each theme in the perspectives of its relevance to our study on the role of the principal as a moral imperative, in transforming the mainstream school to reach out to all learners. Below are our findings

The principal, as a moral imperative should undertake personal professional development for competent leadership in an inclusive school: The principal was a holder of a recognized Montessori Teacher's diploma. When she started the Baraka school she realized that she had children with special needs, therefore she enrolled for a master of education certificate module in Inclusive education from a reputable educational institute in Karachi.

She said:

When I realized that my school was inclusive, I asked, “what does that mean”? So I enrolled for training because I had to know the philosophy and practices behind it. I must keep in pace with the growing trends in education so that I can pass on the same to my teachers. Otherwise, what business would I be doing here, claiming to be a principal?

Her decision to train in inclusive education was a positive initiative because during the interview we realized that she was very conversant with the guiding principles of IE. Teachers also appreciated the fact that she was very resourceful and that they could run to her with any problems which they encountered, and she was able to sort them out on the spot. She conducted workshops and training sessions in Inclusive Education and Teachers Professional Development courses at the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) and the Teachers Resource Centre (TRC) in Karachi, a fact that made her keep up to date with the changing trends in inclusive education. In relation to this, Fullan (2003) says that if learning organizations have got to be effective, the principal has to be the lead learner, he says “If principals do not go out of their way to learn more (inside and outside of the school), regardless of what the system is doing they cannot become a pressure point for positive change (p. 31). This means that in order for principals to effectively implement Inclusive Education, they must first and foremost be trained in order to understand the basic principles behind it.

The principal as moral imperative should develop a School Vision, Mission and Beliefs that support Inclusive Education

The principal can make the school accessible to all learners by challenging the negative attitude to special needs through a relevant school vision, mission and aims. One of the significant roles of the principal lies in the ability to develop and articulate a relevant school vision. The starting point of a meaningful school philosophy in an inclusive school would be to challenge the beliefs and attitudes of all stakeholders about children with special needs, since beliefs and attitudes have been identified as the main

barriers to inclusive education (Peters, et al., 2005; UNESCO, 2003; Singal, 2005; Ainscow, 1998, 2005; Clough & Corbet, 2005). The school mission, vision and belief of Baraka school, were in themselves inclusive by nature and formed the foundation of the school as inclusive community.

The mission, vision and belief of Baraka school, focused on the child, without any exceptions, as special, important and as requiring nurturing through individual attention. The vision emphasized the importance for children to learn together as opposed to segregated schooling. On the wider perspective, the mission's aim was to bring changes in the way the stakeholder 'think' so that they could support, respect, tolerate, show commitment and accept responsibility in nurturing the diverse needs of the learners.

A well stratified school vision can enable the principal to challenge the existing status quo about the inability of mainstream schools and teachers to teach children with special needs, by insisting on equal value for all children through sharing and demonstrating a strong belief that all children can learn.

The principal, as a moral imperative can use her/his childhood experiences to develop shared values and inclusive beliefs: The principal's moral values were related to the UN principles on equal rights for all human beings. In this case the principal used her childhood experiences to support her beliefs in the following ways:

- Ability to deal with other peoples fears associated with interaction with people with special needs.
- Voicing and propagating the IE philosophy which advocates for equal value for all.
- Exercising patience while giving teachers and students time to understand and develop a relationship with SEN children.

The study revealed that the principal held strong personal values for all children, rooted in her life history which formed a strong value base to shape and influence the inclusive practices in the school. She had childhood experiences of two special needs children in the family, a cousin who was mentally challenged and a nephew who was

hearing impaired. She had a lot of fear about how to interact with them, because the one who was mentally challenged used to beat them up. But through prolonged interaction with them she says that she realized that they too deserved respect, they were compassionate and affectionate. She also realized that they had the potential to learn from others and interact positively with others.

She therefore said that from this kind of experience, “Then children just became children for us”. This is a phrase that she repeatedly used during the consequent interviews, and it emerged to be a common phrase in the school. In all the interviews with the teachers students and parents they repeatedly reminded us that “all children are just children” I realized that the principal had developed a school culture of equal value for all children irrespective of whatever differences they had. According to Sergiovanni (1992), values play a very important part in “constructing an administrators mindscape and in determining leadership practice” (p. 9). This fact fitted in quite well with the principal’s role in Baraka school.

Similar fears seem to have emerged among the students and teachers too. A teacher said, “The main problem here is fear ;(*the fear*) is that how you can handle these special needs? But the principal helps us overcome all this.”

Similarly, a student said she was afraid of sitting with other students with SEN but through continued interaction she had come to appreciate them. “I just came the other day and I was kind of afraid. I kept on asking why I had come to this school. I was afraid. Very afraid and kind of just wanted to avoid them (*SEN students*)”.

When I asked the principal in the final interview how she handles the fear that teachers and students have about interacting with SEN children, she said:

I have gone through it (*similar fears*) and I know what it means. It is just lack of understanding. So I give them time (*teachers, parents and students*), I have got to be patient with the teachers, students and parents. I also talk, talk and demonstrate; and eventually everybody gets used to it and they become good friends and happy too.

It emerged from this theme that for IE to succeed, the principal should

understand the fears associated with socialization of people with special needs, especially those with disabilities. She/he should, therefore, exercise patience and understanding while giving the teachers, students and other stakeholders, time to internalize the situation, develop positive relationships and finally give support to SEN children.

The principal as a moral imperative should Provide support for diversity through equal involvement, participation and positive attitude:

For a school to be inclusive, the principal would be expected to maintain a strong presence in the school environment and in as many school activities as possible, in order to get the larger picture of how the school is operating. In Baraka school,

- The principal was ever present and participated in most school events in order to reinforce participation for all
- She openly communicated and verbalized support for all.

The principal personally supervised and enforced where necessary and occasionally admonished teachers and students who did not support participation for all. A good example is about the class 6 teacher who had refused to include an SEN Child in the interclass sports competition. The principal said:

“I found out on the first day we went for practice that Ali was not there. And I asked this teacher why wasn’t Ali in any team? And he said, you know he only disturbs and he doesn’t run...So I told him, by not putting Ali in any race, you have made a statement, that Ali should not be here. Then why pretend? Then let Ali be out of school.....So the teacher went and made a slot for Ali and so Ali competed on sports day and everybody was happy.”

While referring to the students, the principal said:

At the time of sports day they would say, you see this one is not fast enough. He is going to make us loose, and I say, fine but he/she must be with you because all of us are responsible. So I give them this message all the time. And this message is so strong it starts right from nursery.

The presence and participation of the principal was very crucial so as to advice and reinforce practices. In this case, governments should never take it for granted that once a policy is established it will definitely be adhered to. Hence,

In the students interview, a student said, “You have to learn working with everybody without feeling bad when your team is loosing, you have to be less tempered not hot tempered”. In relation to this One of the parents also said:

I find my daughter involved in everything, every function, tabloid, tae kwando; whatever they do she goes there. And on Mondays they are allowed to read something in the assembly, obviously she is not that good but she always takes some book and says, mummy, can I take this for assembly reading? I say ok! I don't know how she reads but she is happy to participate.

Similarly, another parent made similar sentiments as follows, “My son is included in every activity, even if he backs out, the school makes sure that he is included in some activity.”

It is therefore apparent that without the role of the principle to reinforce and where necessary admonish negative practices, students are likely to be in schools but never get a chance to participate in learning.

The Principal as a moral imperative should lead the school in developing school policies that support inclusive education: The principal can make the mainstream school welcoming to all learners by challenging the rigid policies related to curriculum, assessment and admission. The principal of Baraka school had developed policies that addressed some of the major barriers to inclusion, namely admission relevant curriculum and assessment

Admissions: One of the principals of IE is that schools should admit all children seeking admission, without insisting on conditions that expect them to demonstrate pre-achieved intellectual skills before they are admitted. The principal said that, “When I started this school, I never felt that disability is any reason to

deny any child admission”.

When asked her if she charges extra fees for SEN students, she answered, “We don’t give extra, why should we charge extra?” This statement actually nullifies the common belief that it requires extra funds to educate children with special Needs. In cases where it should cost more, then, this should be silently done through cost sharing by all parents. This means that the fees charged to all students should be the same, and should cater for the total cost of educating all the children collectively without putting weight on individual learners needs. Different fees schedules could be the beginning of segregation hence would go against the principles of Inclusion.

Most of the parents expressed great relief with the fact that when they sought admission, their children were enrolled without any problems as compared to the other schools, both local and international, where they had tried to get admission without success.

Assessment and Evaluation: The issue of assessment of students’ academic performance is one of the policies that emerged very strongly and favorably in this school. She vigorously defended this policy to the extent that parents who felt that Baraka school was bad because there is no competition, she allowed them the option of transferring to other schools.

The school policy did not allow ranking of students during assessments in order to discourage ‘unhealthy’ competition which would portray some children as being academically poor. The principal said:

This competition you see in everyone and all over the schools is non-existent in Baraka school. There are no exams where you can say I came 1st, you came 2nd you came 42nd. That kind of competition is not here and we hold onto this philosophy.

In the school magazine of May, 2004, Volume 5 issue 3, the principal had written the following words in the administrator’s corner:

For high achievers education is nothing but a race for A's and those deemed at risk are not provided the required support and opportunities to help them succeed. Ironically, so far, this tried and tested formula of success has failed to produce better people for a better nation. The fact is that education is not a race for A's but a tool to unleash the true potential of a child.

The termly reports for all the pupils mainly used assessment rubrics to grade the children (not ranking them) as follows:

- E- Excellent
- D- Developing
- N- Needs Improvement.

Apart from academic skills, a wide range of abilities were also assessed, such as how a child initiates activities, participates in team work and collaboration, appropriate behavior, following class rules and instructions and handling materials with care. The school progress report was a 12 page document that gave very comprehensive analysis on the child performance within a given semester. Analysis of the reports revealed that while some students with special needs scored poorly in some academic skills, they scored 'Excellent' in areas like punctuality, obedience, attendance and participation in co-curricular activities. This boosted a child's morale and worthiness to be in school a fact that could serve positively to reinforce retention of Special needs children in a mainstream school.

We are aware that issues of assessment of performance are one of the major barriers to IE (Carrington, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1999; Ainscow, 2005; Singal, 2005; UNESCO, 2003). Fullan (2003) identifies one of the moral imperatives of the principal as the ability to improve the learning of all children, including closing the achievement gap.

The principal as a moral imperative should Provide for flexible and wide curriculum, flexible teaching and learning methodologies and a wide range of co-curricular activities. In Baraka school, the flexible curriculum for some children was seen in the fact that:

- learning activities and assignments were being adopted to suit the learners' abilities
- there was a wide range of curriculum and co-curriculum subjects to provide for variety
- Activity based learning and field work were emphasized.

The principal understood very well the importance of flexibility in teaching and learning methodologies. During the interview, she said emphatically:

If a child cannot walk, then please don't put him in a place where the walking part becomes so important. Let him do something that does not include walking so that he does not know that something is wrong.

This quote reinforces the importance of the curriculum to respond to the needs of the children without intimidating them into doing what they cannot do. This is a fact that most of the curriculum designers do not necessarily take into consideration.

The flexible curriculum allows teachers to allocate the students only the tasks that they can comfortably manage. Parents of special needs children appeared to be comfortable with this arrangement as one parent remarked, "This school makes a child independent. Sometimes I don't have to supervise his homework because it is according to what he is able to do. There is no comparison, everybody goes according to his speed and that is the most important for children."

The school curriculum consisted of the following core subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, History, Islamiat, Geography, Urdu, Information Technology and Art. The co-curricular subjects included Music, Clay modeling, Drama and Movement, Career Counseling programmes, Career shadowing programmes and Voluntary Services Programmes. The school has a library, media room, activity rooms, and a computer laboratory.

Most of the learning and teaching was through activities. In the school magazines, there were various photographs of different learning activities, for example, a carpenter demonstrating how wood can be shaped into different articles. There was also a

picture of children out in the garden planting, ploughing and weeding flower beds during which took time they also learnt names of different gardening tools and parts of plants.

The students received great exposure through an immense variety of co-curricular activities such as the sports day, spring festivals, earth day, Right -on Conference, geography fair where I served as one of the guests, spellathon, readathon, to name but a few, and year end parties. Some of the places which were visited by students included the zoo, Hill Park, market place, dentist clinic, salt pans, union industries, farm house in Malir, Kachi Abadi .. Evidence of these visits was in various school magazines and the photographs available in the school. During the period of data collection, the class 3 students took a trip to Manora Island. When they came back, they shared their reflections about the trip on the school's notice boards. They made various sketches of what they had seen such as the sub marine, the clock tower at Keamari, the fisherman's boat and a lot of other ideas that were very important to their learning. These were put on display on the school's main notice board. A parent said the following in reference to field visits:

This school is more up to date and takes a child out. Academics are not that important for them, to them is a matter of developing an all round child. They take them out to the zoo; to the police station...we can't take them out ourselves. We are so much afraid of the environment around here we can't take them to the police station, but what they do here is very important for the child.

The moral imperative of the principal is to involve parents and the community for effective school management.

In Baraka school, there was strong evidence of parental involvement in the school as seen in the fact that:

- parents were allowed to hold discussions with class teachers and share their children's concerns with the teachers
- parents suggested certain teaching methodologies which were adopted by the school
- There was a parents' management committee.

- The principal referred parents to specialists for specialized services for their children.

There were two annual meetings for parents every semester. Apart from these, parents were free to make appointments to come to the school and share their opinions with the teachers and advice the teachers about issues concerning their children. As one of the teachers said:

Even Anees's mother came and talked to me and explained that he is complaining that he is unable to understand. I was new and new teachers don't easily get accepted by these kids. So when I was talking I used to face that way *{back against the child}* and he could not read my lips. And since I discussed this problem with his mother I am now able to understand him. Now I give him attention and extra time.

In the parents interview they pointed out that they often came and discussed their concerns with the principal and the teachers and that she always listens. A parent said, "The principal here listens to you. She is very honest. I appreciate the fact that she is always willing and she treats you as an equal and as an intelligent person".

Parents of children with special needs can also suggest certain teaching methodologies for their children and the principal allows the teachers to try them on. A parent of a child with autism explained how she introduced some form of visual timetable to incorporate in the child speech therapy sessions and the school agreed to try it on. She said:

For the last one and a half years I have gone to different experts and they have told me a lot of things about my child and I am in a better position to tell this school what my child is. And they are ready to take that and they have already started with, I believe, 10 minutes of the therapy that I recommended.

When questioned about this in the follow up interview, the principal said, "Yes, if it sounds practical we try it on. This is very important because if it works with one

child, we take it up for other children too. So it is to the benefit of the school.”

Wolfendale (2004) agrees that parents have detailed knowledge than professionals about their children and that in cases of children with recognized disabilities many parents are likely to know more about their children’s disabilities and the appropriate services needed.

Though Baraka school is privately owned, it operated with a management committee of 10 parents. The parents were asked to volunteer to serve on the committee. The appeal to serve on the committee was stated in the parents’ handbook. Parents who could not avail time to serve on the committee were asked to volunteer other services to the school such as accompanying children on trips, officiating during official functions in the school or to serve the school in any way that they found beneficial. The parents also conducted fundraising events for the school and they also ran a bank account. The money went towards school development projects and equipping the library, laboratory and co curricular activities.

Families feel comfortable to enroll their children, more so those with special needs in an environment that is open and where teachers are competent and friendly. A positive attitude, coupled with respect for difference, care and adequate attention paid to the needs of the children gives the parents the confidence to entrust their children to the school, as one parent said, “Baraka school is an extension of the home”. Parents entrust their children under the care of a principal who is transparent and open in discussing the child abilities and inabilities. Open door policy enabled parents to come to the school and to openly share their fears and expectations with the staff and this served to sustain the presence of SEN children in the school.

The moral imperative of the principal is to *develop a supportive school environment* for teachers and provide opportunities for teachers’ professional development. This can be enhanced in the following ways:

- Hiring staff members who are willing to respond to the diverse needs of the students

- Allow for a Probation during which the principal should personally supervise and coach the teachers and , as well as bring in professionals to train teachers on the job how to relate with and teach SEN students inclusive classes
- Avail opportunities for teacher development internally and externally
- Regular staff meetings for reflective practice
- Flexible timetables to allow time for planning and for teachers to observe and learn from each other.

First and foremost, In Baraka school, the principal herself, with the support of her two other partner principals and the school committee, participated in hiring the teaching staff. This ensured that she hired staff that conformed to the ideals of inclusive education. She explained:

So when we interview them for the job we tell them we are an inclusive school. And you will have some special needs children in the school. Are you willing to teach them? And when they agree, they are given the job.

This fact cannot be taken for granted because issues of attitude and cultural beliefs are very strong in teachers just as much as any other community members. Therefore, the willingness to teach SEN children, and more so, children with disabilities has got to come from the teachers themselves, even if at they did not understand the meaning of inclusiveness. Care was taken not to tell the teachers who the SNE children were and the kind of special needs they had. The teachers were expected to discover for themselves.

The teachers underwent a three months probation period during which they learnt to understand the limitations of the learners and how to interact with them. Those who did not make it during the three months were “shown the door”, said one of the teachers. Another teacher said:

I think the first three months here, which is probation period...is

considered for us as training because that is when you are picking up the most, and that is when the boss is telling you, this is wrong, and that is wrong and this is right. That is the time you hear about that and if she is happy with you then she keeps you on the job.

When new teachers were hired, they were not told the kind of children they were going to teach, possibly in line with the inclusive policy that does not allow labels on children. They were only told that the school is inclusive. The principal said, "Let the teachers go to the class first and encounter the children. If they face any problem then they can come to me and seek advice."

I asked the teachers how they felt about this kind of practice. One of them said "You know the best idea is that you don't have any preconceived ideas about the child, you don't have any mind blocks towards the child. This gives you the advantage of discovering the child, but also discovering yourself by the way you deal with situations."

This is supported by Ainscow (1999) who says that labeling children only helps to justify their low attainments and therefore the need for separate educational arrangements. Possibly this is what the principal was trying to avoid. On the other hand, Zollers et al., (1998) says that school reform measures that are imposed upon classroom teachers may not be readily adopted and that "If inclusion is imposed on staff who feel powerless, the staff may not wrestle with and solve the difficult issues that arise from school wide changes in curriculum, staffing assessment and instructional practices" (cited in Carrington, 1998, p. 164).

This kind of practice in Baraka school appeared to be a realistic approach to training teachers to discover and internalize new approaches, towards handling the diverse needs of the students on their own without feeling pressurized to do so. This is proof that the principal was conversant with the inclusive philosophy which discourages the medical view of disability, which diagnoses and labels children as incapable of achieving highly within certain parameters.

However another teacher explained how her first days in the class threw her in total confusion, although she says that the principal helped her out and she

managed to settle down and she was happy to teach in an inclusive school compared to the other seven previous schools she had taught. She said:

When I joined this school I had problems because there is, you see I (*hesitant*). I knew about Ali (*the autistic child*) but I didn't know about Habib, (*a child with cleft palate*)...So he writes very slowly and he cannot even copy properly. So I had problems because I thought I could be asked if his work was not complete because in my previous school all children were normal....So I went to the principal and talked to her about these students and she told me don't worry about these students because they write slowly. And she told me, with a student like Habib, let him do two questions instead, when you give others four. Don't ask him to do all the four because he can't. So that is the kind of help I got from the principal".

The principal also facilitated the staff by availing teacher development activities within and outside the school. Professionals and specialists were often called into the school to address the teachers concerns. Teachers were also sent for workshops in some of the leading education development institution, like AKU-IED and centers like the British Council and the Teacher's Resource Centre (TRC).

The principal said, "We invite specialists here to talk to our teachers and sometimes to work with them in class, and sometimes to demonstrate how to communicate, how to organize the class. Psychologists come, physiotherapists and speech therapists, they all come".

On the same line, a teacher said, "If a child is hearing impaired for example you don't just go yelling at them because that gives them a headache. That is what we learn from the medical personnel and other professionals who visit us." Similarly, another teacher said:

Internally, a lot goes on. Every other day this teacher is off to IED(*Institute for Educational Development*) for a day or two, the other teacher is off to the Resource Centre for a week or a couple of days, every now and

then professionals are coming in to talk to teachers or students. Internally we are just learning a lot. Teacher to teacher...and more so principal to teacher.

This is evidence of ongoing teacher development, which helped teachers to manage and cope with their teaching practice, there by combating the prevalent belief that if teachers are not qualified in special education, they cannot teach children with disabilities.

There were two staff meetings in a week where teachers shared the challenges which they faced in the previous week and planned for the next week. During these meetings, the principal pointed out issues which she observed within the week. These meetings, according to the principal, help her to gather feedback from the teachers to inform policy and help her and the staff to reach collaborative agreement on their responsibilities in the school.

The school timetable allowed some free lessons for teachers so that they could sit in each others' classes and observe in order to learn from each and give feedback to each other. New teachers were attached to experienced teachers in the school for mentoring purposes. A mathematics teacher who had been in the school for three months said, "The principal of the senior school is a math teacher and you know I am a math teacher and I am new. And when I came to this junior school she (the principal of junior school) kept on sending me to the senior school to learn from her."

The moral imperative of the Principal in a mainstream school is to Model inclusive practices and values while mobilizing support for SEN children. In Baraka school, mobilization of support for SEN children was demonstrated in the following ways:

- Availing forums for parents of SEN children to rally for support from their fellow parents on inclusion of their children in the school
- Talking to students to persuade them to show support for new students and students who were experiencing transition problems
- The principal personally modeled inclusive values of affection, tolerance, respect and support for diversity.

When some parents complained about their children mixing with those with special needs the principal provided the parents the opportunity to mobilize for support from fellow parents. The principal said:

And one of them came and said, my child has started acting like this child, started making faces and twitching his eyes like those disabled kids... then we make them sit with parents of SEN children, and they share about each other, then they realize that they are also parents and that they want the same for their children too. Luckily this has gone out. Everybody knows Baraka school is an inclusive school.

There was also evidence of support during transition, for a child who had to repeat a class. The principal narrated how she had handled the issue:

Last year I remember we were holding back a child now in class 7. Now before the child came to school after summer vacation I went to her class, the class that she wasn't going to come back to. And I explained that today was going to be a very difficult day for her, she was going to go back to her former class. I said she is going to go to her previous class so let us make it better for her. Be with her during break because she is your friend and lets not just make her conscious of the fact that we all notice that she was not going to be there. And I was so proud of my class because they made her feel so normal that the girl went through transition well.

During our study in the school, there was a new student whom the principal had noticed that she was taking long to make any friends, and was hanging alone during break times. The principal said:

So we keep looking around and this girl is alone at break time so I have already spoken to her class teacher. The next thing is to speak to her

classmates when she is not there...you see if someone is unhappy, why is that person unhappy, even if it has to be a teacher or someone...something like this I have to interfere.

We think this is not just evidence of support but also of the principal being touch with what goes on in the world of both the teachers and the students and trying to enlist their support where necessary. It is important to also note that when children with special needs fail to receive support during transition period, be it from one grade to another or one level of education to another, they usually drop out of school and if they do not, then it may affect their performance UNESCO (2005) says that learners who are unable to proceed with their classmates to the next grade may experience low self-esteem and are likely to develop negative attitudes towards education, and may become candidates of an eventual drop out. Therefore, the principal being able to mobilize for support during transition works positively in favor of inclusion.

When we observed the lessons, school assemblies, breaks and the geography fair, we noticed that there was a great deal of positive interaction and support for SEN children coming in from their peers. Such support was in form of collaborative working groups in the class. In one of the classes, the peers read out loudly to the class, work written by a child who could not communicate verbally. Presentations were done collectively in groups during the geography fair. Seating arrangements in class were on rotational basis to allow every student the opportunity to sit with and give support to children with special needs at any one given time. A student explained that:

Many times teachers tell us to work together. Sometimes they allow you to choose whom to work with, sometimes you have no choice, you have to work with people you don't like...but we must help each other because everyone is not the same.

There were certain terms that appeared common in the school. The children described the principal as 'always happy, always there for us, always ready to listen, sympathetic, very caring, very nice'. While describing relationships among themselves the students talked quite often about the importance of supporting one another, helping

one another, respect one another, appreciate and sharing with one another..

Apart from support, the principal also modeled other values such as affection, care, compassion and respect for all. One of the parents narrated how one day when she visited the school during lunch time, she found the principal feeding a child who had refused to eat. The parent said, “I was really amazed that the principal would take up her time, and sit with the child and feed her so that the child will not go hungry the whole day.

“Another parent said that when she enrolled her child, she thought she could bring along a special aide teacher to protect her child, but she realized that the principal was so caring there was no need to employ extra support.

The parents who were interviewed appeared to be concurring that, Baraka school is just like “an extension of the home.”

We observed that the principal took lessons in most of the classes and substituted for teachers who were absent or busy on other duties. She also managed by moving around the school and by interaction with students, teachers and support staff. She had a strategically situated office from which she could view the whole compound and play fields and she would rush out of her office the minute she noticed something that called for her intervention.

Conclusion

Through the research study conducted in Pakistan it emerged that school routines, and demands by the principals and school leadership do have an impact on whether children with SEN should be admitted and retained in mainstream schools. Some of these demands include expecting the children to exhibit certain pre school social, physical and financial abilities before admission as a guarantee that they are the right material for the school. Failure to admit children who do not meet certain preconditions can be a major barrier to access to education

From the above study it emerges that the role of the principal in inclusive schools is very demanding and requires a well informed and committed person. In the

absence of enabling legislations to reinforce the implementation of IE, it appears that schools will continue to rely on the moral imperatives of the principal.

From the findings of our study, a moral principal would be one who believes in a strong connection between duty and what is good; influenced by her own good will to do so as espoused at the beginning of this paper, by Sergiovanni (1999) and Leithwood (1999) It begins with personal initiative for awareness through professional development courses; challenging existing beliefs about children with disabilities and teacher's abilities to teach them; challenging educational and curriculum policies that are biased against children with disabilities; involvement of parents and community and giving individualized and collective support to students, teachers and parents.

However, we must take note of the fact that the ability of the principal to influence the development of IE in a school depends on contextual factors. It is likely to be easier for principals of private schools, as in this study, to implement IE as opposed to those in public schools. This is because Private schools enjoy a greater autonomy in implementing their own policies at the school level as opposed to the public schools that have to conform to the Government policies and guidelines exclusively.

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