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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

A New Phase of Special Education in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

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Sri Lanka schools need to change to include more children with disabilities into ordinary classrooms. Education is put forward by the authorities as important target for equal participation for children with special educational needs in the form of inclusive education.

This case study on inclusive education is carried out in eight schools in Sri Lanka, four from each urban and rural areas. It is inspired in design by triangulation used in ethnographic studies. The study involves children with and without disability, principals, ordinary classteachers, special education teachers and parents of participating children with disabilities.

The study has an interpreting approach aiming at 'understanding' the complicated process when language only is not a pre-condition for understanding and has its base in hermeneutic tradition. The questions investigated are how schoolstaff understand inclusion and if some exclusion is taken for granted or applied to certain groups. It is also to study if children with and without disabilities interact with each other, and how parents of children with disabilities who participate in the study experience their children's education. In addition it is to find the differences in view about inclusion between schools.

The background material covers a brief description of Sri Lanka and its educational development, different views on integration and inclusion, looks at international documents, investigate cultural aspects and looks at inclusion in practice.

The results are 'thick' meaning that the material has a literal description of the course of events, interpretation of meanings and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and rules, public values, deep-rooted attitudes and views.

All the eight schools are practicing inclusive education on some level. Most of them have a conscious approach leading to more and more children being included into ordinary classrooms. In none of the schools are all children with disabilities/special educational needs rejected by their peers.

This study illuminates that decisions taken by governments has implications on state-, provincial-, district-, and local level but that the most important change must take place in schools and class-rooms. Most teachers and principals in the study are willing to support inclusive education if they are provided with skills training pertaining to inclusive education, time for planning and necessary resources. How inclusive education is perceived is also a matter of culture.

Acknowledgments

Disagreements continue among educators, parents and community members in regard to inclusive education. Personal perspectives will influence how you look upon the vision that all children need to be together – need to feel participation and community – need each other to develop to the fullest of their potential. Somebody has said: *There is only one child in the world and that child's name is ALL children.* This is the motto for the report.

It may take only one person to have an idea and to write a report but it takes a community to make it into something presentable. Without the support and contribution of many individuals over a period of several years this report would never have matured. First and foremost, my daughter Maria and my grandchild Isabel stood by me right from the beginning taking care of my dogs while I was in Sri Lanka.

Part from school-staff, children and parents in the Eight Schools in Sri Lanka my two interpreters Nayana Deldeniya, and Nandani de Silva have been helpful. Very special thanks goes to Nandani de Silva who was my major interpreter for her enthusiasm and with whom I have discussed many important issues related to understanding of specific cultural aspects but also to interpretation of inclusive education.

During writing the report I have received comments, stimulating discussions, advice and guidance by Ann Ahlberg whom I thank and acknowledge. I also thank those colleagues of mine working with Special Needs Education who share my vision of 'A school for all children'. My gratitude also goes to Bob Kaill for helping me making my 'Swenglish' more English.

When initiating this study it was my long time dear friend and stimulating colleague Director of Department of Special Education at the National Institute of Education, B. L. Rajapakse with whom I discussed and agreed upon the aims of the study. We both wanted a study that could benefit reflections in Sri Lanka and Sweden about Sri Lanka special needs education development as the two countries have had co-operation regarding special education for many years. Rajapakse passed away during the course of the study but I still want to express my gratitude for the support and engagement he showed me during the years I worked with him.

'May you attain Nibbhana'.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES	6
SRI LANKA AND EDUCATION	9
Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Education	10
Special Education Development	11
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	15
Inclusive Education in Documents and Statements	15
Integration versus Inclusion	18
Inclusion and Special Educational Needs	21
Inclusion and Community Based Rehabilitation	22
Cultural Aspects	23
Inclusion in Practice	25
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	28
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	29
METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION	32
Case-study as a methodology approach	32
Interviews	34
Pilot interviews	36
Content	36
Observations	37
The Complete Observer	37
Participant Observation	37
Participants	39
Selection of Schools	39
Data Analyses	41
Credibility	42
Reflections and Ethical Issues	43
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EIGHT SCHOOLS	45
Urban and Rural Schools	45
Four Urban Schools, U1 – U4	47
U1	47
U2	54
U3	58
U4	61
Four Rural Schools R1 – R4	65
R1	65
R2	68
R3	71
R4	75
The Eight Schools in comparative perspective	79
School buildings and supportive environments	79
Culture of Inclusion	81
Interaction in classrooms and during intervals	82

Attitudes of school staff	84
Parents attitudes	86
Peers' attitudes	87
Children as resources	88
DISCUSSION	90
Views and ideals	90
Influences from Western world	92
Support and empowerment	93
Educational enhancement	93
Supportive role of special education supervisors and special education specialist teachers	95
Principal's preparation as leaders of inclusive schools	96
Support by parents and peers	96
Support for Curriculum development	97
Reflections	97
REFERENCES	99

INTRODUCTION

Among the least powerful people in society are those with disabilities or learning problems. They have, among other things, limited opportunities for education either because there is no provision for children with disabilities or if enrolled they do not succeed under the required conditions and are therefore in risk of being rejected. Many groups compete for economic resources that are limited, not least in Third World countries.

As a long time consultant to the Sri Lanka Ministry of Education and to the National Institute of Education, I have been involved in the world of education with special reference to special education¹. The concern I have for children with special educational needs results from a growing disillusioned observation of what the ongoing traditional segregated models of schooling often lead to. Existing programs are not likely to change the situation for children, who are not enrolled, drop out or who have special educational needs. Qualitative improvements must be based on understanding the needs of these children and the wishes of their parents. Much current discussion focuses on models, material and economic factors. Sometimes the population and country's development is expressed in terms of gross national product or income level. The Western World thinks of poor countries as *worse off* in all aspects. This is a one-dimensional attitude that leaves out important facts that give meaning to peoples' lives. From my point of view any study involving aspects of disability in *poor, developing, the South or Third World*² countries – all names for the poor majority of the world's nations – must also be concerned with a

¹ Even my years in Eastern and Southern Africa working in UNESCO special education project in the Region, as well as being consultant to Vietnam National Institute of Education and Science and the Ministry of Education, have given me possibilities to reflect even deeper and further on the effects of the educational approaches selected.

² There are many different expressions used to distinguish the 'Western World' from the rest of the world. Throughout this study I have chosen to use 'Third World countries' mainly as a contrast to 'developing countries' which is value laden as it suggests a progression of less and more developed nations, and fails to view development over time and in space (López, 1995, p39)

whole composition of social, cultural, and religious aspects. I have a vision for the societies where I live or work; a vision of not only allowing diversity – but even celebrating diversity – where individuals are valued for what they are.

There has been a recent tendency to change the meaning of the educational concept. Over the last decades a willingness to achieve basic education for all has grown in Third World countries, and many international conferences have been held to promote and inspire countries to plan educational services for all their children. Currently only a little over one-third of the children who start primary education in the Third World nations complete four years which is the shortest required time to learn to read and write in a functional way according to a UNESCO report (1993). Some information indicates that the number of adult illiterates is increasing due to early dropouts and non-attendance.

Sharing ideas and information about practice is central to developing skills, knowledge, understanding and reinforcing changes of attitudes and values. No doubt much can be done to make schools and teachers aware of the possibilities that are available for students with special educational needs. Research available from Third World countries dealing with inclusive education and the benefits of such approach is scarce. Few practical successful programs can be shown. Ongoing discussions among educators often provoke strong and differing opinions as to the benefit of inclusion in schools.

Past failures to reach all children in need of education have occurred for a number of reasons. Probably the major reason can be blamed on beliefs that it is possible to expand existing models, and calling this expansion integration or inclusion, rather than through developing completely different and innovative models. Emanuelsson (1995) discusses the impossible strategy of talking about integration when children who are different from the ones perceived as normal are moved into general classrooms and addressed as 'the integrated ones'. With such strategy it will sooner or later happen that the individual is seen as an intruder and thus failing. In practice this means that the education system simply takes the action of moving the child out of the classroom or makes him drop out for good instead of adapting the situation to correspond to the individual's unique learning requirements. A number of studies have compared segregated, or pull-out programs in special education with education in ordinary classrooms. Many of these studies have found that for any ability level a general classroom placement is the most positive choice because there are few, if any, positive effects for students who are placed in special educa-

tion settings (Meyer & Putnam, 1988; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). Persson (1995) in his study of special education in ordinary schools in Sweden supports this view and argues that the consequences of special education actions must lead to interaction as a natural act. Children with special educational needs should be the concern of the whole school and all personnel in the school.

The themes and questions dealt with in this chapter are the basis for my research problem. I have chosen to deal with them based on eight schools in Sri Lanka. My interest is to describe and analyze how the development of inclusive education and institutional practice is proceeding in Sri Lanka. I want to find out how inclusion is realized in class-rooms by principals, teachers and children who are disabled as well as how peers perceive their classmates who are different from themselves, and if the relationship between parents' wishes for their children's education and inclusive education development are parallel.

DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

It has been noticed that services to children in need of special education take a long time to develop. One cause for slow development might be that such services are too expensive which Helander (1994) indicates is the case for health services. On the other hand, most countries do have the idea of basic education for ALL children, in their official policy. Even where education is expressed as compulsory for all, it is likely that many children with disabilities or other learning problems do not attend schools due to limited provision or the enforcement not being strict for these groups (UNESCO, 1988).

As early as 1979, UNESCO reports that expert opinion and various research surveys suggested that approximately 10 to 15 percent of children of school age could be identified as disabled and required active intervention and specialized services. Jönsson (1995) points out that planners in any country could take the generally accepted figure of ten percent to indicate magnitude of problems and the number of children requiring special attention. Miles (1985 b), criticizes this figure, and says that with a Western definition these figures might be true but have little relevance for Third World countries. When local definitions of disabilities are taken into account, relevance figures drop significantly. Lagerqvist (1992) suggests that about 2 % of the total population in Third World countries could benefit from rehabilitation. In either case the figures are enormous and there may be as many as 200 million moderately or severely disabled persons in the Third World of today, most of who have no access to any kind of service. One of the reasons is that governments do not have the finances to deliver specialist services for the people believed being in need of such (Helander, 1994). The findings that Miron (1994) refers to are that services in any country are diversified where individual policy makers and professionals not only within the same country but also within different socio-economical, cultural and regional groups hold

different views and attitudes. The consequence of this is that services have taken various routes in the course of implementation.

Coleridge (1993), and Miron and Katoda, (1991) relate from a historical perspective that in all countries and cultures people with disabilities systematically have been denied their human rights and privileges. Time has brought with it reforms which have increased the possibilities of those with disabilities to live a more normal life. One of these reforms is the provision for education which ought to be as integrated as possible into regular schools. Integration has come to be a key issue facing education for children with disabilities and special learning needs. This is because it is seen to be more ethically and humanistically desirable and not only because of the shortcomings of segregated special education provisions.

The access to educational services for children with disabilities has developed in a similar mode in various countries. UNESCO (1974) points out that the development of education for children with disabilities can be seen to follow four stages. The first stage is when schools attendance is optimal. Here education is available to those with economical, intellectual or physical resources. Children with disabilities are generally excluded, even if some institutions are established by charity organizations. The first groups to be accepted for education have been the blind and the deaf. The next stage is when school attendance is compulsory. During this time the first institutions for mentally retarded are established and later the institutions for the severely physically disabled persons appear. The third stage is the one when school-leaving age is raised. School efficiency is focused upon and entrance to upper levels becomes competitive. Students with difficult behavior or difficulty in coping with academic tasks are screened out or subjected to remedial instructions outside the classroom. The final stage is concerned with educational renewal. Normalization, educational integration and flexibility in the school system are themes discussed. This results in enabling children with disabilities to stay on in the regular school.

Stangvik (1989) notices that the sequence of developing services for specific disability groups has a hierarchic order starting with the blind and thereafter the deaf, further to the mentally retarded, the physically disabled, the emotionally disturbed, the speech impaired, the gifted and finally those with learning problems. Such order;

Which has been observed in the history of advanced industrial societies, seems to be shown too by developing countries which are industrializing in a much shorter span of time (p. 94).

Charity organizations were the first to provide educational opportunities for children with disabilities but those reached only a marginal amount of children in need. Little attention was given from the public sector. Later when the public authorities began to be involved and to contribute, they gradually brought these services under their control.

Jönsson (1989) points out the importance of abolishing a parallel school system for children with disabilities. He argues that this has been shown to be a fundamental mistake, as ALL children are not regarded as members of the same society merely because of the action of developing separate services. The same is proven by Gjessing (1988) in his Norwegian study: *For some of the students special education functioned well, for some it did not matter, and for others it is a tragedy or catastrophe* (in Haug, 1997, p. 21). Analyzing the results of special education for all children collected Gjessing has shown that the positive and the negative effects counterbalance each other and the result is 'no effect'. He is specially disturbed by the fact that children with learning problems receive special education, as they do not learn faster when receiving it. The recommendation he makes is that ordinary education must improve in such a way that it suits all children, which means changing forms for teaching and forms for working.

Another factor to be concerned about when developing special education services is the trend that disability categories are most likely to swell in number when the intellectual demands on a certain culture or society increases, and the society has at the same time more access to funds. This observation can be connected to the widely criticized use of labels in recent years as labels as such do not change the learning situation for children (Hill & Rabe 1987). On the contrary labeling can badly stigmatize children (Tomlinson, 1982; Ainscow & Twedde 1988). Even if the labeling process is known there is evidence that this phenomenon continues to have a strong influence on the thinking in the practical planning of services and the life of disabled persons (Fulcher 1989).

SRI LANKA AND EDUCATION

The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, known as Ceylon until 22 May 1972, when it proclaimed itself the Republic of Sri Lanka, is an island country in the Indian Ocean, with some 17,5 million people in 1994, inhabiting 65 600 square kilometers, where the president has executive powers (Perera, 1991). There are sharp differences in geological and ethnic composition as well as in demographic distribution. Even though Sri Lanka today is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society the interaction between the two major groups, Sinhalese with 74 percent of the population and Tamil with 18 percent has been characterized by antagonism ever since liberation. Buddhism is the predominant religion with about 79 percent followers, mainly from the Sinhalese ethnic group and the Hindu followers are 16 percent from the Tamil ethnic group. The Christians make up some 7 percent and Muslims another 7 percent (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1992). There are two major language-groups spoken, Sinhalese(74%) and Tamil (18%). A large part of the population, specifically from urban areas, speaks English due to the fact that Sri Lanka was colonized by Britain and under British rule until 1948 when it become independent.

The Sri Lanka economy is predominantly based on agriculture, dependent on exports to obtain foreign currency. Its chief exports are tea, tourism, gemstones and human labor to the Middle East. A recent development is the free trade zones geared to an export market of e.g. garments. Almost all essential industrial products, including petrol, must be imported. Like many Third World countries, Sri Lanka has become dependent on trade and aid.

The country is marked by the colonialization of a number of rulers in the past. In the sixteenth century the island was conquered by the Portuguese, then came the Dutch, and finally the British. When the British left in 1948, they also left behind a growing discontentment and dissatisfaction between the Tamil group and the Sinhalese major-

ity group. Sri Lanka is a marked polarized society since ancient time as it is greatly built on cast system. The caste system does not play a major roll today but is still taken into account when marriages are arranged. This polarization has also been rooted in the injustice distribution of education for the two groups where the English favored the Northern Tamils giving them higher and university education that made the Sinhalese majority feel repressed. Since the early 1980s, Sri Lanka is in a state of conflict due to the demand for a separate state by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam³.

Historical and Contemporary Aspects of Education

In Sri Lanka school services traditionally have been academic oriented. The first schools in Sri Lanka were Buddhist schools, ranging from village schools to centers for higher education. The British colonial education was mainly concerned with education in English for a small group of the Sri Lanka elite. However it did allow for Christian missionaries to organize schools where the medium of instruction was the children's mother tongue. Both the Buddhist and the British systems have contributed to the education in Sri Lanka (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1992).

Under the Sri Lanka Constitution of 1978, every citizen has a right to education. The Sri Lanka draft report (1996) by the National Education Commission estimates that some 8% of children between 5-9 years and some 30% of 10 years old children do not participate in any kind of educational program. Children from urban shanty areas, tea plantation areas and remote rural areas seldom attend schools due to, among other reasons, lack of school buildings and/or teachers⁴. The same has been true for children with special educational needs. However, the Government planned to introduce an eight year compulsory primary education from July 1998, thus making education compulsory for all children 6 -14 years of age. As in most Third World countries where economic resources are limited, the government bodies have set the priorities. Two approaches are therefore recommended for the realization of the objective (National Education Commission draft report, 1996)

- ensure total enrollment of children aged 5 - 14 years in the schools

³ 'Elam' is a Tamil word for freedom.

⁴ More often than not it is also due to poor income level in the families preventing them from purchasing school-uniforms or pay school building fund contribution. The examination system is yet another major obstacle for children to succeed in continuing education through primary and secondary level

- provide alternative structures of schooling to give a meaningful and adequate education for the drop-outs and non-starters (p. 4)

The latter activity is aimed to be achieved by the year 2000 and the whole program is expected to be completed by the year 2001 according to the draft. Each of Sri Lanka's eight provinces has, since the early 1990s, a provincial department of education with a number of divisional offices, each consisting of 10 to 15 cluster schools.

According to a major Sri Lanka report eight percent of children are not competent to start school and another 22 percent are competent only if given special help. In addition 62 percent of children are competent for entering the first grade, and the remaining eight percent competent for direct enrollment in the second grade (National Institute of Education, 1988). The same study shows that 30% of children entering in small schools⁵ need extra support in basic skill areas such as reading, writing and counting. Research carried out in Sri Lanka (Piyasena, 1982) showed that teachers identified 15.8 percent of ordinary school children as slow learners. It was found in identification and screening procedures that 80 percent of these children had one or more disabilities. The follow up study after six years showed that 43 percent had dropped out and 24 percent had repeated at least one grade (Piyasena, 1982).

Special Education Development

Care of people with disabilities has a long history in Sri Lanka. Already in the 3rd century BC Buddhist emperor Asoka organized care institutions for people with disabilities. Ceylonese ruler Buddhadasa a century later revived this practice: *For cripples and for the blind he built refuges in various places...* (Geiger, 1929, p13-14). How long these asylums' lasted is unclear.

In modern time one of the groups with the least power to influence their situation has been and still is made up of the families of children with disabilities and other learning problems⁶. The children of these

⁵ Lowest in the hierarchy in the school system ranks the small schools with enrollment of 100 - 150 pupils or even less. In such schools there can be only one single teacher employed which has serious consequences from many aspects, and especially if the teacher is on sick leave for a longer period of time.

⁶ Unless pointed out for specific reason children with disabilities and children with other school difficulties will from here on be called children with disabilities or alternatively children with special educational needs. The later is the term officially used for educational purposes in Sri Lanka for these children.

families have lacked educational opportunities in Sri Lanka. This has been due to no access to special education services or because they have not been able to successfully participate in the ordinary class situations. The provision of school opportunities has reached only a small fraction of the children in need. Children who have been offered some school provision were placed in the few special schools for the blind, the deaf or children with learning difficulties such as mental retardation. Two-year teacher training programs in three specialties, teachers of the blind which started in 1960s, for the deaf in 1970s and for the mentally retarded in 1980s, is carried out at Maharagama Teacher Training College (TTC). During the mid 1980s the existing special education practice and policy was questioned and the educational possibilities for children was increased by the training of ordinary school teachers in short two week training courses in special education where attitudes were discussed.

In *The Basic Rights of the Disabled*, Disabled People's International (DPI, 1981:106) it is stated that:

Knowledge is essential for all development. Every child has a right to education and this right must consequently include all disabled children. In the initial stage of all development schemes in the educational field the need of disabled people must be taken into account. Teaching should be carried out in the child's natural environment. All steps necessary to make the teaching process available and meaningful should become a normal part of the work carried out in the schools.

During at least the last 10 years worldwide discussions on how to achieve basic education for all children has been in focus. UNESCO (1993) writes that hardly two-thirds of children who start primary education in Third World countries will acquire reading and writing skills as they drop out from school before they complete year four which is seen as minimum period of education to develop these skills. With this in focus Sri Lanka has developed plans and goals for child centered services. At the same time these plans take into account the relatively high drop out figures and non-attendance. Traditional methods of instruction in the classroom⁷ are seen as a major cause to the large numbers of drop outs and non-attendance. How to improve the quality of instruction and to meet the needs of school children with special educational needs has been discussed in order to

⁷ The same pattern is true for pre-schools that usually are private, exist mainly in cities, and are academically oriented. They are seen as stepping stones for entering 'good' schools. Small children (2,5 years old) are admitted to pre-schools, often called Montessori Schools, where they spend about three hours a day. These pre-schools do not have any resemblance with the pedagogic that Maria Montessori established. The curriculums are heavy loaded with skills that equip children with knowledge that prepare them for their lives in the existing school system.

decrease the risk of children dropping out during primary education. Actions have been taken during the period by training ordinary school teachers (López, 1988).

According to NIE officials the most successful steps to reach education for as many children with disabilities and learning problems as possible during the last ten years has been the training of core-teams which started to function in 1986. Those teams are compiled of special education teachers who are teachers for the blind, the deaf and the mentally retarded, which are training ordinary school teachers in awareness and special needs education issues during school holidays (López, 1988). These teams are now attached to the provincial education offices with the resource centers that has been established in the majority of the provinces, and is being built in remaining ones. During the period of institutional co-operation between NIE and Göteborg University, which commenced in 1991, several team-members have passed Bachelor of Special Education (B. Ed) in multiple approach to disability and special needs education with special emphasis on developing inclusive education. In 1994 all eight provinces have established such core-teams. In the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO Report of the Fourteenth APEID Regional Seminar on Special Education (1994, p. 211) Sri Lanka representative reports that there is some fear that after implementing the 'Education for All' program special education *is losing facilities* (p. 211). The representative who wrote this means that there is not only one solution to the problems faced, indicating a favor of special education services in special classes and special schools.

The recent decentralization of powers to the provinces which has taken place during the early 1990 has increased the possibilities to train the majority of ordinary school teachers in changing attitudes and improving teaching instructions. This action can help teachers accept children with all kind of special educational needs into their classes. In the eight provincial departments of education there is a director of special education. This person has had training either in the education of the blind, the deaf or in mental retardation. To overcome the specialization stigma most of them have been selected for the ongoing B. Ed. in special education.

Almost all provinces, except the trouble-torn northeast, have developed resource centers with facilities for in service training and guidance. Specialist teachers trained in different disability areas are in charge of the centers. In a Sri Lanka country report presented at The Asia and The Pacific Program of Educational Innovation for Development on Special Education (Perera, 1991), it was reported that

10,6 percent of school children are disabled. In the same presentation it was reported that the policy for special education is to 'integrate handicapped children with normal children in the same school setting' (no page number) and is regarded as the most important contribution to normal living.

The educational authorities have realized that priorities have to be re-focused. The resources available will never be large enough to train and employ the various specialists that are needed for the more traditional methods of teaching. There will nevertheless always be a risk that some of the provinces do not give attention to this important matter. Decision makers and practitioners such as teachers, supervisors, volunteers and consultants may feel that it is not possible to include children with special educational needs, or at least some of the disability groups and children with other problems, into the regular classes. They might rather feel that such children should be segregated into special schools or special units in ordinary schools.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive Education in Documents and Statements

Since the early 1980s a number of conventions and guidelines from international organizations such as The United Nations have been worked out. Already in 'The United Nations World Program of Action concerning Disabled Persons' (1983) it was stated that;

120. Member states should adopt policies which recognize the rights of disabled persons to equal educational opportunities with others. The education of disabled persons should as far as possible take place in the general school system. Responsibility for their education should be placed upon the educational authorities and laws regarding compulsory education should include children with all ranges of disabilities, including the most severely retarded.

These recommendations were amplified in *The UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, and unanimously taken by the members in December 1993 (Rule No, 6, Annex II).

In *The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child* (CRC) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 2nd 1990 has been ratified by almost all Governments, among them Sri Lanka in 1991⁸. The adoption of this Convention by countries across the world clearly points out that all children have the right to be cared for and to receive compulsory education. Articles 28, 29 and 31 are specially concerned with education, leisure and cultural activities.

⁸ According to Rädde Barnen (Save the Children, Sweden) administration bureau there are only two countries, the USA and Somalia, remained to ratify the Convention of the Right of the Child in September 1998.

Article 23 guides member states in matters directed towards children with disabilities and thus writes:

Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child... shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development (article 23).

A number of articles define relevant education for children as an education that equips children with knowledge and skills that will help them with challenges in life. Such challenges are connected, not only to literacy and numeracy, but also to the ability to co-operate and negotiate, and to acquire empathy. Article 28 defines inclusive education and 28(1) specifies *the right of the child to education*, and that such education must be achieved *on the basis of equal opportunity*. The Convention states that primary education is compulsory (article 28(1a)) for all students including those with special educational needs. Moreover, it is the nation's responsibility to *encourage the development of different forms of secondary education and to make them available and accessible to every child* (article 28(1b)). It is important to notice that the words *all* and *every* when referring to the obligations, that the states undoubtedly have adopted on paper, apply to children with special educational needs as well as to so-called 'typically' children⁹. While the Convention appreciates that all countries do not have resources available immediately, it gives these countries directions to make right priorities, and to ensure that the commitments signed are implemented.

The idea/philosophy of inclusive education was first given incentive by the United Nation's conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 where 'education for all' was promoted.

In United Nations Standard Rules (1993), rule 6 we read:

States should recognize the principal of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.

⁹ Many authors are using the term 'typical children' when describing children without special educational needs or disabilities.

This was followed by The World Conference on Special Needs Education that was held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. In the Salamanca Statement (1994), which contains principles, policy and practice in special needs education and is based on representatives of 92 governments. The following read in The Statement gives a firm base for the policy:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire educational system (article 2).

The policy is clearly stated in article 3:

We call upon all governments to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education.

This statement constitutes an important contribution for striving towards education for all through the development of inclusive teaching. The conclusion of the declaration represents future directions for special needs education. The same conference points out that:

Education policies should take full account of individual differences and situations. The importance of sign language as the medium of communication among deaf, for example, should be recognized and provisions made to ensure that all deaf persons have access to education in their natural sign language. Owing to the particular communication needs of deaf and deaf/blind persons, their education may be more suitably provided in special schools or units or classes in mainstream schools (article 21).

Sida (Swedish international development agency) has in its policy (1996) strong support for inclusion in education¹⁰;

The objective of Sida support to special needs education is to improve the quality of and access to basic education for children with special learning needs due to various disabilities. (...) Sida supports the integration of special needs education into ordinary schools, as this is generally the most effective method if the great majority of children with special needs are to be reached. It is important from a social as well as from an economic point of view. It is also important because teachers

¹⁰ The Sida policy document is being revised during the editing of this report and will probably have a stronger indication towards inclusive education policy.

who have been trained to meet the needs of handicapped children can also apply their new child-centered methods to teaching the other children in class. (p. 15)

Integration versus Inclusion

Many definitions of integration and inclusion can be found related to education. Almost 20 years ago Söder (1980) refers to integration as the process of placing a child with disability in an ordinary class or group of handicapped children in an ordinary school. Söder discusses four levels of integration. The first is Physical Integration meaning the distance between persons with disabilities and ordinary society. The second is Functional Integration meaning the functional distance between people with disabilities and others. Thirdly he talks about Social Integration meaning the social distance between these groups and fourthly, Societal Integration where all in a society have the same access to all the services available.

According to UNESCO (1983:14);

integration refers to measures taken to provide special educational resources, within the ordinary educational system, for those children who need them. The aim of integration is to avoid or reduce the restrictions on any aspects of a child's development which might result from segregated education.

Emanuelsson (1996) argues the need for a clear definition of concepts. The implication of a term is important. Does a term indicate a problem in the child or is the problem connected to the situation? He argues for the use of children *in* difficulties and *in* situations that are complicated. He is thus pleading for the use of a concept, which is downright for special education purpose. Bauth, Jönsson, & Svensk (1995) mean that such a concept should reflect contemporary society and its ideas.

The argument that Emanuelsson (1995) has in favor of integration is that it is a value issue founded on views of man and democracy. It is more than moving disabled persons into or out of groups and/or common activities. He argues that integration means the increased acceptance in what is normal existence, as part of regular groups and togetherness. Integration can also be expressed as an attempt to *try to avoid segregation*, and that the challenges for and the responsibility of any group are to *fight against the needs for segregation* (p. 5). This is

done by changing ways of working, of norms and rules, values etc. by making it possible for all to fully and wholly partake in activities and to have the possibility to learn and develop. As integration must be seen as a social goal, Emanuelsson argues against the use of the term integration in connection to individual students.

Inclusive Education is a term which becomes more and more widespread taking the place of *integrated individuals* which has been used when placing an individual child with disability or other special educational need into an ordinary classroom often without deeper understanding of the individual's need. There are arguments as to which term - integration or inclusion - should be used. Booth (1995), for example, argues that integration includes the struggle for comprehensive education which is a wider interpretation of integration and rejects the ideas that integration as a phenomenon is limited because it is only about additional arrangements in schools which continue to be unchanged. Inclusion on the other hand implies a more radical set of change where schools embrace all different children. Mason (1995) suggest that inclusion is synonymous with an intentional building of communities, and Putnam (1993) supports this by arguing that an inclusive classroom setting is one in which the members recognize each other's individual differences and strive to support one another's efforts. The same interpretation of inclusion concurs in the writings of Villa, et. al (1992);

.. schools end up "standard-setting" in a way that encourages teachers to find differences and to see them as fixed. While we acknowledge that some students are "slow" or "disabled" or "behind", we test them...instead of ... making the curriculum recursive, and deploying teachers and classes to maximize catch-up, our rigid routines put such students perpetually and increasingly "behind" - thus, in perpetual despair or alienation (ppxiv/Forward).

López (1995) has discussed the meaning of inclusive education with the Staff at the Department of Special Education (DSE), National Institute of Education and Science (NIES)¹¹ in Vietnam. They came to the conclusion that from the Vietnamese point of view the deeper meaning *is to celebrate the differences of all students in the same class*. Education thus, should take place in a regular class in the student's nearest school and should respond to the diversity of children's needs and

¹¹ NIES, with its different research departments, is the advisory body to the Ministry of Education in all matters concerning education and teacher training. The major discussion partners has been Dr. Duy and Mr. Le Van Tac who are continuously 'fighting' for inclusion to happen. A number of written guides and papers promoting inclusion in class-rooms had been published in Vietnam by Mr. Le Van Tac and the Hanoi branch of Save the Children, Sweden (Rädda Barnen).

abilities. It also means that an individualized teaching approach, adapted curricula, and individually adapted teaching aids and materials must be used.

Walker (1995) contrasts inclusion and integration in the following way:

Integration emphasis	Inclusion emphasis
Needs of 'special' students	Rights of all students
Changing/remedying the subject	Changing the school
Benefits to the student with special educational needs to be integrated	Benefits to all students including all
Professionals, specialist expertise and formal support	Informal support and the expertise of mainstream teacher
Technical interventions (special teaching, therapy)	Good teaching for all

(p. 14)

Haug (1997) contributes still other aspects and is in favor of the use of *inclusive integration* and *segregated integration* to separate the actual actions taken by schools. Segregated integration is when the child with special educational needs receives help from a specialist either individually or within a special group. Haug argues that the concept 'need for special education support' is individual oriented. In it's meaning lies that after being separated from the ordinary education, the aim is that the child shall go back and function as other children. The aim is that the individuals will be able to contribute in the society when they reach adulthood. The ultimate goal is social integration. On the other hand inclusive integration means that education shall take place within the ordinary classroom where the child is enrolled. This aspect of education has its roots in social justice and *collective democratic values* (p. 7). This approach will contribute to creating positive grounds so that these children will be able to function in the community. Great importance is attached to social learning, and on developing spiritual community. The school is to function as a complete city in itself it is normal that children are different, and these differences are part of learning experiences. Teaching in these environments is to take place in the ordinary classroom with changed ways and forms of working. The teacher must have a general and universal competence. The

understanding, that common terms such as 'children with special educational needs' is a social construct, should thus be given in training of all teachers.

There are other aspects that are important to consider. Guralnick et al (1995) compared children's interaction in three different playgroups. 'Typically developed' children and developmental delayed children interacted more in inclusive groups than did their peers in segregated groups. Important for the occurrence of interaction is that staff has intentional methods of structuring and helping along relationships. This gives support to Moore, Carpenter, and Lewis (1987) who points out three things which must be effected for inclusion to succeed, namely carefully structured joint activities, opportunities for co-operation and freedom from a continually hovering adult presence. Leyden (1996) reviews evidence demonstrating a wide range of benefits, both curricular and social, which can come from peer tutoring and other forms of collaborative learning.

Inclusion and Special Educational Needs

The term "special educational needs" is applied to children who are unlikely to achieve the levels of physical, educational, or social development normally appropriate to their age. Accordingly it refers to children who are disabled or have an socio-economic or cultural disadvantaged. Hegarty (1993) suggests that it is better to use 'the *language of special learning needs*' before 'the *language of handicap*' because it provides a framework for considering the educational needs of larger groups of school-going children. Another implication is that it puts the major responsibility on the school and takes away responsibility from the individual child.

On the other hand, Haug (1997) argues that the concept 'special educational needs' refers to individual pathology in the child in forms of medical or psychological damages or faulty development. The consequence of this thinking is to give children compensatory treatment. For schools in the case of '*thinking special education*' the alternatives to common education are individual lessons outside the class, small groups for different disability groups, special institutions or other forms of specialties. It develops a marked dividing line between special education and education. Thus it gives a ground for the increased development of professionals to take care of these children.

Inclusion and Community Based Rehabilitation

During the last decade the Community Based Rehabilitation concept has been accepted in many developing countries to eliminate the constraints of institution based rehabilitation, and integration/inclusion is seen as the educational part of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR). The CBR approach stresses the need for the equalization of opportunities and for opportunities being provided on an integrated basis and not separated from the mainstream. As for the needed educational services, the move from missionary schools and charity services has seldom been accompanied by mainstreaming special education facilities (Helander, 1994).

The Center for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) in UK suggests that an inclusive school should be community-based because the school ought to reflect the community as a whole. Mason (1995) suggests that inclusive principles for schools might incorporate the intentional building of community. Such schools should be barrier-free accessible to all community members. They should also promote cooperation and equality. This definition is in line with policy described by the increasingly accepted Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) concept, which contains an effort to change the system

for improving service delivery in order to reach all in need, for providing more equal opportunities and for promoting and protecting the human rights of disabled people (Helander, 1994, p5).

In a joint position paper by the three UN organizations, ILO, UNESCO and WHO (1994), the major objective of CBR is

to ensure that people with disabilities are able to maximise their physical and mental abilities, have access to regular services and opportunities and achieve full social integration within their communities and their societies.

This broad concept is further explained:

CBR is recognised as a comprehensive approach which encompasses disability prevention and rehabilitation in primary health care activities, integration of disabled children in ordinary schools

Even Salamanca statement (1994) supports CBR because

Integrated education and Community Based Rehabilitation represent complementary and mutually supportive approaches to serving those with special needs. Both are based upon the principals of inclusion, integration and participation, and represent well-tested and cost-effective approaches to promoting equality of access for those with special educational needs as part of a nationwide strategy aimed at achieving education for all. ...(Salamanca Statement page 17 A # 15)

It has been shown that some Third World countries start their inclusion move by setting up CBR projects in selected provinces or districts which provides experiences and expertise for a continuous growth. This development has an interesting growth in Vietnam where law, policy thinking, school development and teacher training have changed accordingly (López, 1995).

Cultural Aspects

Miles (1995) criticizes western studies for not considering attitudes and values held in Third World Countries, and the implications they have on development. O'Brian and Murray (1997) state when reflecting on culture and disability; *people with a disability in a certain culture have a culture prior to their disability* (p. 57). Disability and development in the Eastern Regions' have generated very few written works. In his study of the rural districts in the North West of Pakistan Miles (1995) reports the following attitudes held by people towards disabilities and people with disabilities:

- a) Mocking, playing tricks; fear and rejection.
- b) Pity mixed with fear; pity overcoming fear.
- c) Alms-giving as a religious duty; alms-giving with compassion.
- d) Idea of community duty; must be a place where they can be cared for.
- e) Ascription of caste status and social needs, i.e. they should be put together with others like themselves.
- f) Should be enabled to live their own lives as far as possible.
- g) Should have access to the rights and services available to anyone else.
- h) Positive action to make rights and services available.
- j) Should have the right to be different. Equality, dignity, opportunity.

And as an afterthought:

- k) Do they perhaps have some views of their own? (p. 53)

These self-reported attitudes are here formulated in steps of increasing acceptability to current western sensibilities.

Also it is interesting to notice that teasing might not be seen as a negative action. Eisenberg (1986) means that teasing is a joking behavior, used as part of a joking relationship. Some teasing is simply for the fun of it and others incorporate messages to meaningful context. Teasing is complex, and there are cultural differences, e.g. among Kaluli (Schieffelin, 1986) teasing and shamming are crucial expressions of children's competence. According to Eisenberg (1986) this form of talk helps e.g. parents to control children and to give them central values in an indirect way.

How humans educate their children is a reflection of their attitudes and beliefs. Segregation of children as a consequence of a disabling condition reflects the belief that these children are different. They have different needs and different aspirations and they are not able to benefit from what is provided to the so-called normal children. It is these beliefs that affect the diagnosis and treatment of people with disabilities within a given country. Such attitudes vary from one society to another depending on socio-cultural, economic, political and religious factors. Most societies treat people with disabilities as incapable of organizing their own lives and even expressing their own will. In many Third World countries governments and aid agencies see disability as a problem, but not a priority. Coleridge (1993) points out that people working with development often expresses their doubt that disability issues are related to development. The implication is that people with disability can be ignored altogether in the development debate.

Negative attitudes are among the heaviest obstacles to integrated educational services for children with disabilities. Several researchers suggest that successful integration depends on altering attitudes towards people with disabilities (Altman, 1981; Hill & Rabe 1987, 1994). Emanuelsson (1995) argues that educators who takes this message seriously must accordingly develop strategies and activities that will help students in ordinary schools to accept and to understand their peers with disabilities. Helander (1994) conveys the message that communities will have to take steps to accept persons with disabilities as capable of integrated living, deserving to take part in leisure activities and have meaningful employment.

Attitudes are important even after physically moving people with disabilities into schools or other activities because a new type of segregation can arise. Dissociating attitudes can develop among teachers,

peers or communities. Such tendencies must be fought (Emanuelsson, 1995). Kapembwas' (1988) understanding is that negative attitudes can become institutionalized by schooling them into the population. In the case of Lesotho, Stubbs (1995) describes that the value system is such that exclusion is seen as unnatural. She indicates that it may be so that in poorer nations inclusion is the common value system. Kisanji (1993) on the other hand discusses that elsewhere in Africa exclusion is influenced by cultural beliefs such as disability is caused by witchcraft, curses, ancestral spirits anger or punishment from God.

Most studies of attitudes towards persons with disabilities in western societies have shown a general negative evaluation of disabilities, but not necessarily of the persons themselves (Söder, 1990). Miles (1985a) reviewed some earlier studies on attitudes carried out in Pakistan. One study shows that 80 percent of respondents were in favor of children with disabilities in schools and that 97 percent were in favor of a law to reserve one percent of government jobs for persons with disabilities.

There is a common understanding that children in ordinary classes who are different from the so-called typical children are teased and abused in school and might develop inferiority complexes. Referring to a study carried out in Sri Lanka (Dissanayake 1982), it is discussed that parental sympathy and the care which disabled children get from their parents is not the same as from other community members. The attitudes at large are negative and their teachers and classmates ridicule the children if enrolled in ordinary schools and classes.

There is, however, research pointing to contrasting aspects. Miles (1985a) found in his Pakistan research that the overwhelming majority of the children with disabilities, who were asked, reported positive attitudes from their fellow classmates. These findings are supported by a study carried out in Göteborg where children with mental retardation were asked about their situation when enrolled in ordinary classes (López 1994).

Inclusive Education in Practice

From Western World practice there are so far few published accounts of successful breaking down the specialist, compensatory thinking and beliefs that separate special education services are the best, into the development of a functioning inclusive education ideology. Some states in the USA, however have radically restructured the whole school system to suit all its children (Villa et al, 1992; Villa & Thou-

sand, 1995). Porter and Richler (1991) report the same for the Province of New Brunswick, Canada. Both are examples that provide ideas for inclusive education practice. Examples from Europe where radical changes have taken place are Spain (Pastor, 1995) through the 1990 Act of Education, and Italy (Buzzi, 1995) with a general law that says that all children with disabilities, regardless of the nature and seriousness of their disabilities are to be integrated in mainstream classes. These are examples of countries, which have made considerable effort and changed laws to enforce inclusion.

Sharing ideas and information about practice is central to developing skills, knowledge, understanding and reinforcing changes of attitudes and values. There is no doubt that much can be done to make schools and teachers aware of the possibilities that can be available for students with special educational needs. I have found that available research from Third World countries dealing with inclusion and the benefits of such approach is scarce. There are few practical models that can be shown. Ongoing discussions often provoke strong and differing opinions on the benefit of inclusion among educators in economically poor countries.

One report available describes the process of developing inclusive education in the Vietnamese school system (López 1995). The author describes the journey to inclusion as *a journey during which lessons from the past are learned* (p. 34). Value change from top to bottom, from bottom to top is considered, and all levels within the school system are involved discussing how inclusion could be materialized in the provinces involved. In summary *it is not a simple formula written down on a sheet of paper* (p. 35). The general agreement of what inclusion stands for has involved the process of increasing the participation of all students in pre- and primary schools as well as reducing exclusion from main-stream curricula, cultures and communities. The change towards community ownership of education is marked by inclusion as a diversity matter where diversity and differences are dealt with in a respectful way.

Yet another perspective on inclusive education has the National Education Planning Program from the Lesotho experience described by Khatleli, Mariga, Phachaka and Stubbs (1995). This program is innovative in a number of ways where the central aspects lie in changing teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and teaching methods in order to be able to accept a diversity of children into education. There will be no special measures such as separate cadres of specialist teachers, separate units etc. The four already existing special schools will change their segregation approach by supporting inclusion. The key

principle is that inclusion is built on traditional Basotho thinking mated with human rights. Csapo (1987) highlights that institutions built in Lesotho violate the traditional care of children in the Basotho family culture, and are thus not valid to build on to develop country-wide special educational services.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

My research interest is to describe and analyze how the development of inclusive education and institutional practice is proceeding in Sri Lanka

The overall aim of the study is to describe and analyze how inclusion is realized in classrooms, by class-teachers, principals and special education teachers working in eight schools. It is also to investigate what peers think about learning alongside peers with special educational needs or disabilities, and how parents to children with disabilities experience inclusive education.

The study strives to find answers on following questions:

How do teachers and principals understand inclusion?

Is some exclusion taken for granted?

Are inclusion and exclusion applied to certain groups of categorized students?

What are the thoughts about inclusion among

children with and without disabilities?

parents with children with disabilities or learning problems attending ordinary classes?

Are there differences in how inclusion manifest itself among school-staff and are there directions for the future visualized?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My interest of knowledge can be seen as belonging to the Hermeneutic research tradition where I seek to increase the 'understanding' of a phenomena - inclusion of all children in education. My difficult task in this study is to widen the 'understanding' of courses of events in a culture I am not born in, and where languages I do not master are spoken, but which appeals to me because of my earlier experiences. Human shortcomings in perception and understanding makes us struggle to find thorough methods to deal with those facts. Gadamer (1965) highlights that language and traditions are inextricably intertwined and that tradition is the medium in which language continue and develops:

The understanding of a language is itself not yet really To Understand, but an accomplishment of life. For one understands a language in that one lives in it...the hermeneutic problem is therefor not a problem of correct mastery of a language...such mastery... is a precondition for understanding in dialogue (p. 362).

Gadamer (1965) means that the arbitrary pre-conceptions, which the investigator carries from the own culture, must be regarded and critically scrutinized before penetration of the collected material. These guided principals and openness cannot be a question of ridding oneself from all pre-conceptions and pre-judgments. It can only be a question of gradually becoming more conscious and clear about the own structure of prejudices. Gadamer points out that the understanding always is related to the own culture. The demands on the investigator are to suspend the own opinion and specially the pre-opinion, which is done by questioning everything. These questions uncover possibilities, and those possibilities continue being uncovered. A pre-opinion, which is questioned because a person says something, does not mean that it is automatically and totally put

aside. In reality the own pre-opinion will be focused, and considered through the questioning of it.

This study has an interpreting approach aiming at the 'understanding' of the complicated process when the language only is not a precondition for understanding. Human thoughts are social in all aspects, and thinking is a public activity is the conclusion of Geertz (1972) who means that any study dealing with a different culture from the own must be questioned. Geertz says that

the organization of social activity, its institutional forms, and the system of ideas which animate it must be understood, as must the nature of the relations obtaining between them (p. 362).

The study is investigating and interpreting the perspectives of the individuals studied which is done by interviews, and by observing their activities in everyday school life. Thus a thorough attempt to understand the individual through his views and actions has been the endeavor in this study. This means that I acknowledge that everything individuals are doing have meaning and at the same time I apprehend the individual as dependent on and having possibilities to influence the environment and the culture. Sjöström (1994) highlights this aspect:

Human beings certainly exist within given frames (inheritance, environment, other humans, natural laws) which give requirements - shapes the frame of possibilities and limitations - for her actions (p. 76).

My task has been to, in an empirical way, survey and describe the relationships between individuals involved.

Larsson (1994) describes the importance to account for pre-conceptions through accounting for the personal experiences which have been of importance and are relevant for the study to make it possible for the investigator to interpret the results when carry through a study. It is of the same importance to realize that the investigator is part of the social context which she describes and can not be an independent neutral individual

one reflects over the own result and how the results are dependent of the investigator's perspective, role and how the research process progressed (p. 167)

Consciousness and consistence in dealing with background-assumptions is a central criteria for quality in research. This is part of the understanding of the perspective chosen. According to Larson (1994) is

the assumption together with the empirical data the central parts when understanding how a result is constructed. To account for the assumptions and the empirical ground is of value because the signification of the results gets clear to the reader.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Case-study as a methodology approach

I have used case-study as the methodological approach where I regard each of the eight schools in the study as a case but chose to see inclusive education as the one phenomenon that I am studying but out from the eight schools. This means that it is a phenomenon, which provides an example of a more extensive group of events, persons or processes.

Merriam (1988) describes a case-study in the following way:

A case study is an investigation of a specific phenomenon, e.g. a program, an event, a person, a course an institution or a social group. This marked and defined system is chosen because it is important and interesting or because of some kind of hypothesis (p. 28).

Hammerslay (1992) adds that it is a

phenomenon about which data are collected and/or analyzed...that corresponds to the type of phenomena to which the main claims of a study relate...It (a case study) involves the investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring (rather than researcher-created) cases (p. 184 – 185).

With this choice of methodological approach my intention is to illuminate different aspects of inclusive education where the focus is on how different schools, and individuals who play important roles in these schools are handling inclusive education out from a holistic perspective. This case study thus is the phenomenon inclusive education.

As inclusive education is ongoing processes in Sri Lanka this study is not only retroperspective and a summation of 'now', but also developmental. In other words its aim is to reflect on the information given

which might suggest how inclusive education could be developed in the future. Merriam (1988) means that the end product of a case study shall be descriptive, comprehensive and thick¹² which is a characteristic of the report from a case study.

My aim in this study is to create meaning and understanding and thus I have chosen qualitative methods for collecting data. In the process of deciding upon the methods to be used a number of factors have been considered. The nature of the studied problem has been one factor to consider as has the research setting with its characteristics and limitations. The methods have also been chosen in the light of the characteristics of me as investigator. My abilities as well as preference for methods have been crucial for the choice. All these factors affect the data collection and processing. Time and money available have also influenced the decisions taken.

This study examines the experiences of inclusive education that teachers, principals, and special education teachers have. It also examines the experiences of parents and students with and without disabilities. This is done by observing interaction in class-rooms, by interviewing staff in schools involved in the education processes, by talking with students without and with 'special educational needs', and with parents of the children believed having disabilities or being in need of special education. There is tension between the three data collection methods used in the study, and the growing phenomena 'understanding'. The interviews can be seen as the superior method because many different individuals are interviewed. Continuous comparisons between the Interviews, Observations and Participant Observations are inspired in design by the Triangulation used in ethnographic studies. Thus the three different methods represent the research settings, and are subject to continual interaction in complementary processes. By this design the growing 'under-standing' is nourished, and continues to widen and deepen.

12. The term 'thick' is borrowed from anthropology and implies that the material has a literal description of the course of events. It also stands for 'interpretation of meaning of... demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and rules, public values, deep-rooted attitudes and perceptions' (Guba & Lincoln, (1981, p. 119) in Merriam, 1988).

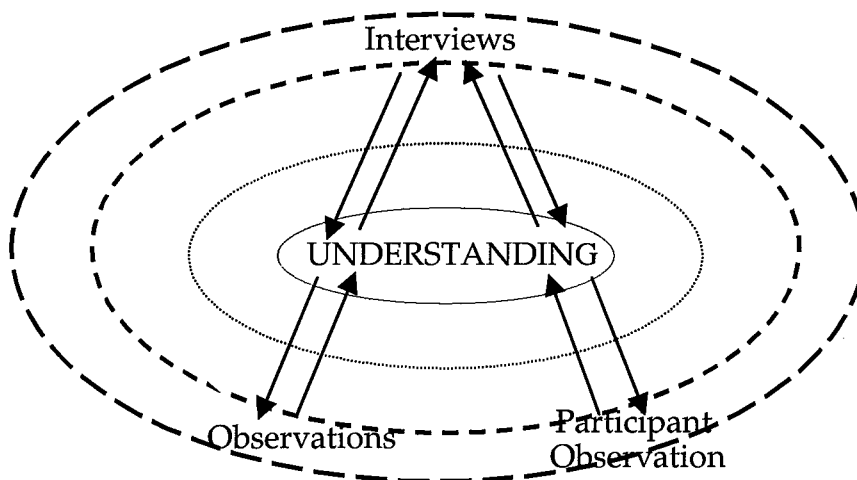


Figure 1

The figure describes the merging of my understanding of the research process in this case study. The 'understanding' of the phenomenon inclusion is widening and deepening through reflecting on incoming information.

The empirical material is composed by:

- Interviews
- Observations
- Informal conversations
- Field-notes

Interviews

The research interviews can be characterized as open dialogues with questions intended to find out about perceptions, and understandings of attitudes at school and in social relationships. All the interviews are semi-structured and learnt by heart. Semi-structured interviews or rather dialogue is defined by Kvale (1996) as *an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena* (p. 5-6). The interviews are characterized by a methodological awareness of question-forms and focus on the dynamic between me - and sometimes with the interpreter in the case when she is present - and the interviewee matched with a tens attention to what has been said. Gadamer (1965)

describes this dialogue as a process of two people understanding each other.

Thus it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject (p. 347)

The aim is to obtain knowledge of the subjects world. The investigation should seek to cover both a factual and a meaning level. This is more difficult on a meaning level and to understand what is said *between the lines*, formulate the message and send it back to the interviewee who gives an immediate confirmation.

In this study children with disabilities themselves have been asked about their understanding being in general education together with non disabled children. Traditionally school staff have not been practicing their skills asking children what they think about different matters, leave alone asking children with disabilities about their feelings and what they like and dislike with studying together with non disabled children. The children involved in this study have given their ideas and opinions. Much consideration was given to how the children articulated their feelings. López (1994) describes the concern that lies in understanding children with communication difficulties associated with their disability. Such difficulties might be difficulty in articulate, non-responsiveness or inadequate references to reality.

Open dialogues characterize the interviews during the informal conversations with the child with disability and with the peers, and the questions formulated are intended to find out different opinions and feelings. During this part of the study no tape-recording took place due to respect and to the fact that the children would be distracted. Each interview with school-staff and parents took approximately 30 – 45 minutes, which means that if also a parent was available for interviews it took at least two full hours in each school. The interviews with principals took place in his/her office after the observations and interviews with teachers, and the interviews with parents after school-hours.

The preparation of interviews with principals, teachers, students and parents contained of developing a simple interview-guide, a list of key words or questions to remember when conducting the interviews.

I did not interview all parents, only those who were available on the days I was in school or when I by chance got in touch with them.

An important ethical issue is that the two interpreters engaged for the interviews done with the interviewees' who did not speak English have a long relationship with me - being colleges and friends for many years, knowing each other's way of thinking - which eliminated misunderstandings and increased trust.

Pilot interviews

A pilot test consisted of several interviews, with two children, two parents and two teachers, where the interpreter together with me took part, and the semi-structured questions were further improved. These interviews are not counted for in the study but were seen as essential for the design of methods.

After the pilot test it was decided that tape-recorder would be used while interviewing adults, especially principals, teachers, special education teachers and parents, allowing it in urban areas in the informal conversations with children when seeing it as appropriate but not in rural areas with children. Patel and Davidsson (1991) writes that *a disadvantage with the presence of a tape-recorder is that it might have influence on the answers given* (p. 70). It was shown during the pilot study that the tape-recorder upset the individuals more than I could imagine and the interviewees were 'absorbed' by it. The aim with the dialogue interview is that meanings are developed and scrutinized, and through the exchange of ideas searched views develops. Another aspect is that when using tapes the outcome of the interviews depends on the quality of the tape-recording which can be an adventure anywhere and specially in the noisy environment that is the fact in schools in Sri Lanka.

Content

The interview-questions were tentatively formulated with semi-structured pre-determined problems to explore. The questions were discussed, improved and adapted in a lengthy process together with the interpreters. This was a needy process to make the questions valid and to ensure that the translation of the interview-questions was as perfect as possible, and to avoid any misunderstandings between the two interpreters and me. As the time factor came in, and the investigator had limited time in Sri Lanka, and interviews could not be supplemented, the tape-recorder was used only with adults and with a

few older students in Colombo where the interviews took place in relatively quiet areas. The information was safer when taken by written notes of the main points, as were quotes from answers during the interview dialogues. In direct connection to each situation a full summation was done where even the intuitive apprehended aspects were written down.

Even if semi-structured questions prepared prior to the interviews were followed I did my best to be sensitive to turns in the shift of focus and moves away from the main subject and I focused on understanding by asking accurate follow-up questions that clarified my unclear understanding. Examples of follow-up questions were: What do you mean by that? Please explain so I can understand! Tell me more about it! What are they worrying you about? What people do you hear from most? How was that explained to you? Does anybody put pressure on you about that? The same approach was used in interviews with children and with adults.

Observations

Data was also collected through observations. The observations were of two kinds. Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) refer to Junker (1960) and Gold (1958) who are using the terms *The Complete Observer* and *Participant-as-Observers* (p. 93).

The Complete Observer

The Complete Observer does not interact with the individuals who are being studied. In doing these observations so called unstructured observations are used enabling the collection of as much information as possible within the area of questions. In this study the observations were carried out in periods of 30 minutes when I wrote down short notes on interactions between teacher and students, and between student and student, after which I withdrew to reflect on the notes taken and to make complementary notes. After this, another 30 minutes with the same procedure took place. In one of the schools one of the observation periods was only 20 minutes.

Participant Observation

During intervals and leisure activities, Participant Observation strategy was used. I took part in these activities, formal and non-formal, during one or two days, during which time I always had access to the

interpreter, as the dialogue is part of this observation. During these periods all children in the school were, at some time, members of the observed group. The time periods varied considerably between schools but an average of 150 minutes were spent together with children and making field-notes.

Throughout the study field-notes were taken. Beach (1995) means that *making field-notes is not unproblematic* (p. 69) partly because it is a process of selection and interpretation as well as representation. Even if this study is not ethnographic it has several similar features. The field-notes e.g. are in this study as in ethnographic studies, the first level of textual representations of events met with, and they are written down during the field visit. They represent events and statements in a descriptive form. Many memos are made. All notes are transformed into sentences directly after the periods of observations. Beach (1995) points out that field-notes must be written up in full as quickly as possible after they have been made as much information will get lost if this precaution is not taken.

The untaped dialogues are carefully noted in the same way, as are the field-notes from the observations. They are transformed into sentences immediately or as soon as possible after the dialogue finishes. The verbatim statements are written within inverted commas to be easy to distinguish from the notes of more shorthand characters. An interview done with the aim of understanding and getting a view of ideas, feelings, and beliefs are more valid than something picked up from tape-recording according to Miles (1990). The interviewee has time to reflect over the questions and is given the opportunity to change their way of expressing themselves to get across the statements made. Beach (1995) means that this is more acceptable than just quoting someone from a tape transcript if the aim is understanding the understanding of the interviewee.

The school observations lasted for close to three weeks where I along with the interpreter, the same individual for two urban schools, and another individual for the four rural schools and two of the urban schools, traveled together. The visits to schools started with discussions with principals who selected the class to be observed. To begin with I along with the interpreter talked to the class to ease the children's tension for the visit and comfort the atmosphere.

Participants

Schools	Children	Principals	Teachers	Spec. ed. teacher	Peers	Parents
U1 ¹³	2	2	2	1	Interview 7 Others 7-10	2
U2	2	1	1	1	Interview 2 Others 5-6	-
U3	1	1	1	-	Interview 3 Others 4-5	-
U4	1	1	1	1	Interview 2 Others 2-3	1
R1	1	1	1	1	Interview 2	1
R2	1	1	1	1	Interview 2	-
R3	1	1	1	1	Interview 3 Others 9-15	1
R4	1	1	1	1	Interview 1 Others 5 - 6	-

Table 1. The distribution between schools of participants involved in the study.

Selection of Schools

For the study the agreement between me and Department of Special Education, NIE, was to select four urban schools and four rural schools situated in the Colombo area and north/northeast/east of Colombo but within a radius of 120 km. As schools are different depending on where they are situated it is important to look at a variety of schools to find variation of perspectives. With this as a starting-point I chose to look more in depth if there are observable differences between urban and rural schools. One boy school with primary education, two boy schools with primary and secondary education, and one girl school with secondary education were selected in Colombo.

In the rural areas one school for primary education (grade 1-5), two for primary and lower secondary education (grade 1-9), and one for primary and secondary education (grade 1-12) were selected. All four schools are mixed boy- and girl schools. Ten children with disabilities representing primary and secondary education were involved in the study. In each school the principal and the ordinary class teacher were involved, as was the special education teacher if such a teacher was employed. The principal selected the classes to be observed. These two categories were interviewed along with class teachers, peers, children with disabilities and parents when available.

¹³ I will mostly use short U1 – U4 for the Urban schools and R1 – R4 for the Rural schools when mentioning any of the eight schools.

Following is a summary showing essential information about the schools where the study is carried out. Table 1 shows Urban Schools (U1 – U4) and table 2 shows Rural schools (R1 – R4).

Kind of school	Enrollment	Special Education Unit	Special Education Teacher	Children with Special Educational Needs in ordinary classes
U 1				
Primary and secondary Boy school	5 000	11 students with mental retardation and multiple problems	2 year training in mental retardation/ physical disability	Many students in ordinary classes
U 2				
Primary and Lower Secondary Boy school	3000	12 students with mental retardation/ multiple problems	Trained in several short courses.	Many students in ordinary classes
U 3				
Secondary Girl School	4 000	No	No	One student
U 4				
Primary and Secondary Boy School	5 000	12 students with mental retardation, many in combination with physical disability	2 year training in mental retardation/ physical disability	Many students in ordinary classes

Table 2. Features of Urban Schools

R 1	Enrollment	Special Education Unit	Special Education Teacher	Children with special educational needs in ordinary classes
Primary and lower secondary school (mixed school)	About 2000	One girl almost always in the unit	Trained in ed. of the Blind	Most students with special ed. needs in ordinary classes
R 2				
Primary education (mixed school)	500	No	Itinerary teacher trained in the ed. of blind children	Students are in ordinary classes
R 3				
Primary and secondary education (mixed school)	300	Unit serves as resource room	Trained in short course	Students are in ordinary classes
R 4				
Primary and secondary education (mixed school)	More than 3000	No students permanently placed in the unit (resource room)	Trained in the ed. of children who are blind	Students are mostly in ordinary classes

Table 3. Features of Rural Schools

Data Analyses

I went through the material to get an overview. The data gathered is full of information about peoples attitudes and values, their needs and ideas, believes and thoughts covering the topic area. The analyses of the data needed considerable time, some in co-operation with the major interpreter, and taking my own reflections into use.

The recordings, and the interview notes were transcribed with the collection of relevant quota in the different areas and as a second step by reducing the information to cover the questions only. A necessary pre-condition in making reduction relevant is that relevant data is

saved. Therefore I read through everything many times before selecting the important information. Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) describes this:

The first step in the process of analysis, then, is a careful reading of the data collected up to that point, in order to gain a thorough familiarity with it. At this stage the aim is to use the data to think with. One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stand out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the bases of common-sense knowledge ...(p. 178).

Credibility

It is important that data is as reliable and valid as possible, and measures were taken in regard to this. It has been essential to be closely related to, and to keep an eye on the participant's understanding of the phenomena which have been studied. Triangulation is a common practical technique used for validating the analyses in ethnographic studies (Larsson, 1994; Kullberg, 1996). In a different sense it is also a key element in other kind of studies e.g. Miron (1994) uses the term for a combination of different methods for data collection. In this study triangulation has inspired the choice of data collection methods as several different methods are used in a complementary manner in order to improve the validity of the information processing, analyzing and reporting (see figure 1. page 34). Interviews were done, for example, with students who have special educational needs and their peers, teachers, principals and parents. Classroom observation as well as participant observation during breaks and leisure activities took place.

One of the two main interpreters was given access to material, and she can thus be considered as discussion partner/co-examiner. She is well known to me, and has professional position within NIE, DSE (Department of Special Education).

Limitations arose in collecting information from interviews, because of language differences, since I speak limited Sinhalese and no Tamil. When carrying out the interviews with the informants using their mother tongue, an interpreter was used. The same was the case when doing the participant observations including the dialogues with students and the follow-up interviews. This approach was mainly followed in the rural schools where English is unlikely to be mastered. Likewise, knowing English does not necessarily mean that one can fully understand the meaning expressed by informants in a different

culture than where I have my origin. Those difficulties were anticipated and discussed at an early stage of the study, and discussions continued throughout.

The study should be understood as exploratory. The intention is to provide general information and a better understanding of the issues involved with expectations and attitudes. The result of the study can not be generalized to other countries due to extreme differences in culture but it is also difficult to generalize to the entire Sri Lanka society due to the small sample. More generally it is due to the fact that within any country there are differences in cultures and thinking. Nevertheless the study does give information about inclusive education development and practice, and social and cultural perspectives and the role it plays.

Reflections and Ethical Issues

Theoretical framework for this study is the 'understanding' of a phenomenon in a culture I am not born in and where the inhabitants use languages I do not master but where I have been living for many years and thus I am familiar with the education structure and culture.

The study is based on class-room observations, features of participant observation techniques, and interviews in the form of open dialogues guided by pre-set questions. My intention is to find out different views and feelings, and under which conditions inclusive education is developing in eight Sri Lanka schools. By using the methodological triangulation approach the aim is to validate data. Hammersley & Atkinson (1993) mean that if in social studies the conclusions only rely on one source the error in data collection is more likely to lead to incorrect conclusions than if using several sources.

The empirical material is relatively large and involves eight schools, four from urban and four from rural areas. Using a variety of methods was seen as central to enabling the finding of a wealth of content and meaning. Larsson (1994) points out that the presentation of results should enable the reader to see aspects of reality from a different viewpoint from what is frequently occurring. These results are subsequently discussed in relation to the background material.

I started the data collection in Urban School 1. At that time I never realized the amount of time each school visit would take, and looking at it in retrospective I found that it would not be possible to spend as much time in each of the other schools I wanted to study. Thus the U 1

visit was longer in time, where I spent more time for each activity except for the classroom observations which in all schools were the same.

It is important to have lived in Sri Lanka to be able to carry out this study as it has because an understanding of educational, cultural and political rules make sense of 'what is in front of your eyes'. As a newcomer or 'a few times visitor' to classrooms could have been a disappointing experience, as little would have been discovered. It is doubtful if a foreign observer gets anything out of such experience, let alone the suggestions of practice that could be relevant to Sri Lanka situations. Even if I do not speak practical Sinhalese or Tamil I understand quite a bit Sinhalese, and thus it is possible for me to follow lessons, and to understand simple conversations.

As I believe in inclusive education, or let me rather say a school where all children have a place as a democratic human right, I have to be watchful of how I can keep a 'neutral' position. The investigator's views influence the outcome of their research.

There has to be a presumption in favor of integration and, in absence of decisive countervailing evidence, it must be regarded as a central principle governing provision (Hegarty, 1993, p198)

Being aware that in studies the researcher is instinctively interpreting the results makes a difference, as one can 'keep an eye' on this fact. If one is not aware and precludes influence in for example interviews, such can occur through the language, pre-assumptions, what kind of dress one uses, or by 'constructing' the research setting. This pre-understanding must not reject the fact that the researcher must be humble since her/his findings will lack credibility and thus lack the power to change if the reports are grandiose and have overstatements in them (Hegarty, 1993).

Anonymity is an important ethical issue. In this study the information given is sensitive. I have precluded the possibility of recognizing individual schools by giving children names as pseudonyms, and the schools can not be identified because neither districts in the urban area nor province or village names are given for rural areas. Only U or R with the numbers 1 – 4 respectively specify the locations.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE EIGHT SCHOOLS

Urban and Rural Schools

A precondition for perceiving the meaning and understanding of the results is a picture of Sri Lanka's urban and rural schools. Therefore I describe the context in which the research is conducted as an introduction to this chapter.

Schools in urban areas have limited pieces of land, have thousands of students, and have several floors. A typical urban classroom has open 'windows' with bars. There are wooden shutters to close in case of heavy rainfall and during holidays. The classrooms are usually held relatively dark due to the warm climate¹⁴. On the walls there is no decoration or information but there is a blackboard. There are always sounds of different kinds coming into the classroom from other classrooms in the same building or from surrounding buildings as well as from the heavy 'horning' traffic. The individual space for each student is small with students sitting very close to each other, often shoulder to shoulder. The more popular the school the smaller the space for students in class, as it is during brakes as many children are on the limited schoolyard at the same time. Schools usually have a kiosk on their grounds where the students can buy snacks and drinks. If there is no kiosk¹⁵ within the school grounds, there are lot of sellers who sit outside the gates providing the students with the opportunity to buy different sweets, drinks or snacks. Mothers of the younger children often sits outside the gate waiting for their offspring to finish for the day. Outside the prestigious schools, cars with drivers are parked waiting for 'their child' to arrive.

¹⁴ Shutters cover the windows to keep the sun away.

¹⁵ Kiosks are small stalls, where a diversity of daily products is sold, that can be found everywhere in Sri Lanka. Both outside and inside schools these stalls supply the buyers with snacks, drinks and sweets.

The typical rural school has access to 'bigger grounds' and usually consists of several one floor buildings. On broken ground or hilly sites, stairs connect the different buildings to each other. There may be more than seven buildings on a hillside. The buildings in such schools have no inner walls and the outer walls are only one third of the way up to the roof on the two long sides of the walls. Several teachers teach his/her class at the same time in the same room. In rural and remote areas most, if not all, of the 'small schools' are situated with about 100 students or less. These schools have poor buildings, lack furniture and teaching aids, and have few and usually untrained teachers. The absentee numbers are high for children and for teachers. Children in rural schools and also in disadvantaged schools in urban areas have high absenteeism due to reasons related to poverty, and the need for children to work. In rural schools this is especially seen in harvest and planting seasons. Many parents keep their children at home during the rainy seasons, as children are known to become ill when being wet for hours in school. Absenteeism is regarded as a major cause for high repetition and dropout numbers and for low achievement (oral information from DSE, NIE).

School starts usually at 07.30 but some local differences exist, and primary education, grades 1 - 5, finishes the schoolday at about 11.00 - 11.30. Secondary students have a longer break after morning sessions, usually 30 minutes, and the teaching continues after that for some hours. The school day ends at about 14. 00. When children arrive home they must attend to their homework¹⁶. Children enrolled in prestigious schools, or during preparation for examinations, usually have private tuition in more than one subject.

The result chapter is divided into two parts: Four Urban Schools and Four Rural Schools¹⁷. Each school is introduced before the outcome is given, and ends with a summary.

¹⁶ Many children enrolled in the most prestigious schools in the major city travel for hours before they reach school in the mornings and their homes in the afternoons. Some children in upper secondary education, grades 10 - 12, can, if lucky, get access to a boarding place provided by the school otherwise boarding places in private homes are also solutions.

¹⁷ Among the Rural schools there is one which is situated in a rural city.

Four Urban Schools, U1 – U4

U1

Urban School NR 1 (U1) has about 5000 students and is a prestigious National Boys' School with primary and secondary education, grades 1 - 12. The school is divided into two separate parts, one for primary education and one for secondary. Each part has a principal though the secondary education principal has a higher position. There are quite a number of buildings with several stories in both the primary and secondary sections. Behind the school there is a play and sports ground. U1 started one of the first units for children with mental retardation in 1985. At that time this was an action that attracted much attention because the school is famous for its high examination results, and for students who make academic and political careers. Inclusion in ordinary classes started in 1986 with two students, one at a time. These students have more severe special educational needs, and both were enrolled in the unit for mentally retarded children at the start. The classes have between 45 - 50 students which makes the classrooms crowded.

The special education unit has, on the ground floor, a spacious classroom with four full walls, windows, a door that can be closed, and a ceiling fan which is unusual anywhere as well as a smaller attached room. At the moment 11 students with severe learning problems/mental retardation are enrolled. Several of the boys have multiple disabilities, such as moving problems in combination with visual impairment, and possible hearing impairment, while all have severe learning problems.

Seven students with more severe learning problems, in grades 2 - 11 and a number of other children with different kinds of disabilities are included in different classes. The head principal does not know the numbers, as the primary school authority of the city has not referred these children *and it is only 'referred children' who are registered as disabled*¹⁸. The ordinary class teachers have no special training, but they get the help they need from the special education teacher when they need it. The principal encourages parents to let their children follow ordinary classes whenever possible.

¹⁸ Quotations, in which informants' voices are presented, are not necessary verbatim quotes except when they are quoted from recorded tapes in English. This reflects e.g. how data was collected and translated from Sinhalese into English by the interpreter.

Priyanta in second grade

There are 48 students in Priyantha's class. After sports activity in which Priyantha does not take part during the early morning session, the students go to their classrooms. The desks in the class are placed in double rows facing each other. Priyantha has his mother with him in the class as 'assisting teacher' and she regularly attends to him, as well as do peers next to him.

A picture of the situation: Priyantha looks at his mother who notices this instantly and makes her way between the narrow seats to help him with his desk-work if she is not attending to any other boy. If she is, she finishes her task, before moving on. As soon as she has helped Priyantha, she attends to somebody else keeping an eye on her son throughout the sessions. There are also a number of interactions between the teacher and Priyantha during the lessons. The teacher gives him questions in the same way as she does the other children. When she understands that Priyantha cannot answer a question she adjusts the formulation and asks once more. Only once during the 2 30 minute sessions is he unable to give an answer. None of his peers react negatively to his answers. It is obvious that this situation is familiar to Priyantha and the other boys. All students in the class do not get questions from the teacher.

During the reading lessons the teacher lets children with advanced reading capacity read the text first, and Priyantha together with several other students read in the second lot. Priyantha reads his part out loud. He has difficulties with his speech and the peers wait for him to finish the part that the teacher requires. All boys do the same activities during the same time. Priyantha asks one of the peers something on two occasions, and he gets responses.

Priyantha and his peers¹⁹

Priyantha often interacts with his mother during intervals. Together they go to the kiosk to have tea and snacks. Priyantha does not play because he falls a lot and *the doctors said it's not good for me*. He does not know why it is not good *but once I hurt ... I was in bed for a long time*. Instead he sits and watches the games. There is nothing else he would like to do instead of watching his peers play. When he stays in

¹⁹ The dialogues with Priyantha and his peers are done partly in English and Sinhalese with an interpreter.

the class-room, which he does at times when it is too hot or rainy, he does home-work or talks to other boys.

Priyanta feels safe and happy in school. He does not feel that he is 'bullied'.²⁰ He does not feel that he has special friends in school, *we are all friends, but my best friends are at home*. He does not meet with his classmates in the afternoons as *we live far from each other*²¹. Three of Priyantha's peers, talk actively with me while others are watching. They testify that they are happy being friends with Priyanta. *We have a lot of fun during intervals* says one of his classmates.

After the schooldays Priyantha and the mother keep company on their way home.

Dushanka in grade ten

There are 49 students in Dushanka's class. Grade ten classes are situated on the fourth floor in one of the buildings. The boys are seated physically very close to each other side by side in the classroom. Dushanka sits in the first row with *my best friends on each side*. During lessons the two peers continuously, every second to third minute, check Dushanka's writing and notes, supporting him in his work when he needs it. I saw 12 interactions during 30 minutes and during the second observation there were nine such interactions as well as whispering interaction occurring five times. At one time, one of his peers asked him surprisingly loudly if he needed something. At that time he was just sitting looking straight ahead. In my notes I have written that he probably was having a fit.²² Dushanka has speech difficulties, and his speech is slurred but his peers have no problem understanding him. They do not ask several times for him to repeat his answers to questions.

During the lessons I observed the teacher checking all students and asking if she was too fast.

Dushanka and His Peers²³

When leaving the classroom after lessons, Dushanka mixes with his peers, chatting and laughing. He and four of his friends do not go out

²⁰ The students themselves use the term bullying which has a different meaning for them, more 'tuffness' in it, than has the word tease.

²¹ As described earlier it is more common than not, that children, especially those enrolled in prestigious schools, live far away from school, and travel to and from school every day. To be enrolled in a prestigious school is seen as a privilege and parents can do almost anything to get a place in such school.

²² As mentioned later Dushanka has epilepsy.

²³ The dialogues with Dushanka and his peers were carried out in English

of the school building during intervals. They lean against the wall just outside the classroom chatting. When asked what they are doing they explain that they are telling stories but they do not want to tell me what they are about because *you will not like them. They are boys' stories only.... Nothing we tell to girls or to our parents.* Dushanka says *I have difficulties climbing the stairs so we all stay here to keep me company.* Sometimes they go down during the longer intervals but it takes a long time for Dushanka. When I tell him that I noticed in class that at one time he became sort of quiet and look straight ahead he answers that he has epilepsy. *Sometimes I get this. Earlier, when I was young I got real big fits...but not now.*

Four of Dushanka's peers are very talkative giving information and joking. They are happy being friends with Dushanka *because he is really a good friend.* They can not describe how. The peers chat during breaks, tell stories or just walk between classrooms, school buildings and activities. As the students come from very different parts of Colombo, and even far away from Colombo, few meet for leisure activities²⁴. Dushanka feels happy in school. He does not feel that he is 'bullied'²⁵ but that all boys tease a lot. He feels that he has friends in school *We are always together in school. They help me with everything that I need. Sometimes I am a bit slow in doing things and then I need help... ...some of us meet sometimes in the afternoons but we live far from each other... ...our parents have to drive us.*

When the school day is over all boys go in a group to the school gate where they separate and go home. Dushanka is picked up by his father.

Teachers' views

Inclusive education is perceived by two ordinary class-teachers, who teach the two students in the study, as a concept used for the teaching of deaf, blind, and mentally retarded children who are taught in ordinary classes. The two teachers think that the special education teacher supports them in all matters concerning the children with disabilities, and other children who have difficulties with school subjects. These two teachers give priority to all the children's needs, and one of them expresses, when talking about the 10-grade student Dushanka, that *I give him a favorable seat with his friends around.* Both teachers are convinced that factors which are important and which make inclusive education possible are the involvement of parents and peers because

²⁴ This is no exemption for the children involved in this study. In prestigious schools children come from all over Colombo and even from Provinces outside.

²⁵ The students themselves use this term and it has a different meaning than the word tease for them.

without the peers' help it would be different. Both teachers have experienced that children can be helpful in many ways, helping other children both inside and outside the classroom also in the afternoons. When the second grade teacher is asked if she has enough time to attend to all the students she says that it is difficult with about 50 students in a class *to check on the ones who need more help than others and help them.* Much subject learning has to be done as homework. She has good experience of help from parents especially mothers. Priyantha's teacher does not think that his mother focuses only on her son. She is helpful and attends to some other children's needs as well.

Principals' views

The head principal and the primary school principal support inclusive education, and accept exclusion only if the child's behavior is uncontrollable. The head principal thinks that inclusion of children with disabilities is in the school to stay and both principals agree that the unit must continue to be a place to prepare children, teachers and parents for inclusion, and that *some children might need the safety of the unit always.* He can not see that children who can not walk e.g. walk upstairs to the classrooms on the upper floors, where the classrooms for the more advanced grades are situated, can remain in school. The head principal was not the school's principal when the special education unit started in 1985, but as he has *a humanistic view of education* he fully supports it, and he often visits the unit. He learns a lot about children and parents by doing so. His opinion is that inclusion works if everyone has the will and inclusion is not forced but is used with common sense. *Common sense is when all participate and the responsibility is not given to the class-teacher only.* The primary school principal thinks that the school has failed in the case of the boy who returned to the unit after one semester²⁶. She had not promised the parents that inclusion into the class would be a success unless somebody from the family could assist in the class. *The parents are well off, and they could have employed somebody who helped the teacher as the boy is severely retarded.*

None of the principals believe there is a need for registration, *as we do not enroll children looking at their disability but finding out what children can do.* The head principal admits that it is difficult for children with learning problems to be enrolled as his school has a high degree of competition which is built into the system. *Children with more obvious problems must wait for a place in the special education unit and from there be transferred to the ordinary classroom.*

²⁶ Each school year contains three semesters.

Special education teacher's view²⁷

The special education teacher is trained to teach children with mental retardation. He functions as teacher in a special education unit and as resource teacher for inclusive education. He perceives inclusion as the *teaching of children with disabilities in ordinary classes, as...a difficult task as teachers do not have knowledge for it.* Sometimes the teacher feels that he does not have enough knowledge for children who need Braille or are deaf, and then he has to take help from the supervisor for 'the Blind' or 'the Deaf' from the city education office. Sometimes he seeks advice at DSE, NIE. *Otherwise my knowledge is enough... I am well off.* He believes that it is better for the children's future if they can be included in ordinary classes but *teaching where children have to sit still is difficult for some.* The teaching style must be changed. When he sees how difficult it is to change he wonders how that could be done. *If it was only for me all children could be in the ordinary classroom.* He thinks that as the situation is now it is not possible from the beginning *because the parents do not give these children attention so they do not behave...they must learn that before they are enrolled in ordinary classes.* One boy has just been sent back to the unit as he did not stay in the classroom. He went out sweeping the ground.

Priyanta's and Dushanka's parents' views²⁸

The two families who were interviewed felt satisfied and took great interest in their children's work. They could not imagine how it would be if their boys were admitted to a special unit. The parents considered their children's friendship with children without disabilities important. One of the parents wondered who would have been his son's friend if he did not go in the ordinary class? About school performance the father wondered how his development and school performance would have looked? Both families highlighted that the high degree of success might be due to their own involvement.

Priyantha's mother often stays in school and supports the class teacher because she does not need to go to work in the mornings. She concentrates not only on work with her own son but supports other children who needed it, *I think that the other boys listen better to what I have to say than does my own son.* Priyanta's mother says that some days she has other things to do and those days she follows Priyanta into the classroom and tells the teacher that she can not remain. She does not feel that it is a pressure to stand by her son's side almost every day because *in our culture that's a mother's duty.*

²⁷ The interview with the special education teacher was done in English.

²⁸ The interviews with the parents were done in English.

Dushanka's father believes that because of his wife's work in school during primary education, secondary functions well, *my wife did the same ... when Dushanka was in primary school.... I think that we have paved the way for this movement in this school.*

Priyanta's mother feels happy with the situation as it is. The son does not need to feel bad, as his peers or the teacher do not reject him. She had not thought about the future thus she does not dare admit that she has any dreams, only hopes that the boy would continue to learn.

Dushanka's father has dreams for his son, *Isn't this a dream which came through?* He means that Dushanka goes to an ordinary class and has friends who visits him at home sometimes. He believes that if his son could pass the exam he might be able to study something. He says that he and his wife agree that it is not the most important thing to have a degree but if Dushanka could study it would be nice.

Summary

The attitudes towards children with disabilities are favorable in U1, which is marked in many ways. The classroom given by the principals to the special education unit is one of the best in the school, and the two principals for primary and for secondary education give attention to the children in the unit as well as in ordinary classes. *Inclusion is in the school to stay and the unit must continue to be a place to prepare children, teachers and parents for inclusion. Some children might need the safety of the unit always.* The head principal encouraged parents to let their children follow ordinary classes whenever possible because he has a humanistic view on education. He says that inclusion works if everyone has the will, *inclusion is not forced but is used with common sense.* Categorization is not needed for entrance to the school. When one child had to return to the unit the principal felt that *we have failed.* He admitted that it was difficult for children with learning problems to be enrolled *as his school has a high degree of competition built into the system. Children with more obvious problems must wait for a place in the special education unit and from there be transferred to the ordinary classroom.* Another obstacle was the buildings with high and narrow stairs.

The teachers understand inclusive education as a term used for *teaching of deaf, blind, and mentally retarded children who are taught in ordinary classes.* They also understand that students who have difficulties need a good desk position surrounded by friends in the crowded classrooms *without the peers help it would be different.* They need to give all

the attention they can to those students who need special help. Priyantha's teacher tries *to check on the ones who need more help than others do and help them*. The teachers feel that they can teach all children in the classes but that they need support and guidance. They involve peers and their capacity to contribute to a positive learning environment. Parents' support is also needed *mothers and specially the mother who is involved now because she really helps. She can do about anything I need and she does not need much instruction*

Parents of children with disability are fully involved both in the classrooms and outside, especially during primary school years. Priyantaha's mother thinks that it is no pressure on her to stand by the son's side almost every day because *in our culture that's a mother's duty*.

The peers do not see a child who is disabled as somebody who they can not be together with but rather someone they need to support. Dushanka in grade ten mixes with his peers, and they stay with him *I have difficulties climbing the stairs so we all stay here to keep me company*. He means that they are always together in school. *They help me with everything when I need. Sometimes I am a bit slow in doing things and then I need help... ..some of us meet sometimes in the afternoons but we live far from each other... ..our parents have to drive us*. Dushanka is happy when in school and teasing is seen as a fact of life.

U2

U2 with about 3000 students is a Primary and Lower Secondary School in an economically poor, and heavy populated district on the outskirts of Colombo. Many of the children have only one parent living with them in Sri Lanka due to the other parent's working e.g. in the Middle East on three year contracts often without any possibility of visiting their homes. Since it is often housemaids that are looked for, it is the mother who accepts work and leaves the country.

The school is composed of several flour floor buildings in a congested area next to a heavy trafficked road. The only play area for the children is a small space in front of the main school building. At a distance from the school there is a sports'-ground where the older children go during sports and sometimes during longer intervals. Other nearby schools also uses the same sports' ground.

A special education unit with 10 children with severe learning problems and multiple disabilities operates in this school.

Sunil's and Weerakoon's classroom

There are 32 children present the first day and 34 the second. The students in the classroom sit six on each bench and in rows behind each other. Two boys, Sunil and Weerakoon, who had been enrolled in the special education unit for children with mental retardation are now enrolled in the class. When school starts in the morning many children are absent but during the first lesson most of them turn up and go to their desks without a word. Both Sunil and Weerakoon share reading materials with their peers, i.e. books in different subjects. The teacher has placed the students who own books next to ones without. She distributes her questions and attention to all children in the class. If a child does not follow the text while others are reading, she asks a peer to show where they are in the text. No complaints or arguments from the teacher about inattention is noticed. Children who need special attention get it continuously as the teacher walks between the desks pointing to the lines in the books. Their peers are attentive to Sunil and Weerakoon giving them glances, a gently push or whispering a few words.

During intervals and after class

No one is left alone during intervals. The schoolyard is extremely small and children are mostly standing still chatting, or playing with a rubber band: *there is not much to do as we can't run a lot or play footballs and things*. Three students, one who was earlier enrolled in the unit, go with two friends to the unit to see what is going on there, *maybe they are doing something I like.... the teacher is nice....*

After school, children from different classes wait for each other and keep company to and from school, *we stay next to each other*. I ask the two boys, Sunil and Weerakoon what they do in the evenings²⁹ and Sunil says that they are allowed to go out to play and he points out his friend. Weerakoon does not answer the question. Some classmates tell me that he must look after his little sister after school.

Sunil and his peers

The boys in this school are not at all interested in discussing with me. As soon as I come close to a group, they 'vanish'. It is a day with heavy rainfall and most children are inside the building during intervals. One of Sunil's friends says *sometimes the teacher asks us boys*

²⁹ It is the normal expression in Sri Lanka to talk about evenings when in Europe we talk about afternoons.

to be extra special nice to those who are not well which is a natural thing for the boys. Finding out what 'not being well' stands for one of the boys explains *that it's those who are ill and sometimes not in bed and come to school*. None of the boys think there is any reason to reject the two boys with disabilities and they are not considered as special in any way *because he is not ill*. Sunil has only difficulty in walking, and later during the discussion this is seen as *no big deal*. Sunil says that he likes the teacher, because she is nice. Sunil also likes the boys in his class. They do not 'bull' each-other but sometimes they tease. The difference is that to 'bull' is to be bad. The boys play while in school, and sometimes in the afternoons. Sunil does not always have homework, and he can not do all his homework because he does not always have books. He lets me understand that maybe he will get books when his mother comes back from Dubai. His friends sometime come to do their homework with him. The teacher never gets angry because he has not done his work. He does not think that he can go to school for many years, and does not respond to the question why he believes he can not.

Class-teacher's view³⁰

The teachers in the school have no special training for teaching children with disabilities but are supported by the special education teacher working in the unit. The class-teacher does not believe that there is a problem including children with disabilities in the classes as *now most of the teachers are used to children who have problems*. She thinks that children's learning problems are not particularly problematic because most children face even greater problems. Many of the children live with only the fathers who might drink and beat them. She thinks that there might be about 20 children with disabilities in the school. *I have two children who earlier were in the unit in my class*.

To make inclusive education function well, she thinks that the class-teacher must depend on the peer's supportive work. *We tell children who are better off to be nice and kind and to help*. She thinks that children in the school usually are more than willing to help, *maybe because everyone has problems sometimes*. The teacher thinks it would be difficult to enroll a child in an upper grade if that child can not climb the stairs. *We can not rebuild the schools that way. There is no space for lower buildings*.

³⁰ The interview is done in Sinhalese with an interpreter.

Principal's view³¹

The principal does not know how many children with disabilities are enrolled in the school. *Those who are in the unit we always have registered as disabled.* He says that the Education Office has a waiting list for children who are severely disabled. The principal is in favor of involving the special education teacher both in the special education unit and in helping with inclusive education work. He understands inclusive education as *to host even children with disabilities in the classes.*

The principal means that he is better off than many of his colleagues in prestigious schools as *I do not need to strive for being high up in the ranking in the examination results as this school is situated in this economical disadvantaged area.* He thinks that apart from the school is poor, it is Mrs. M (the teacher in the unit) who has the major credit for inclusion of children in classes. He does not believe that children who can not walk can be promoted to higher classes because of their narrow and high stairs. *We can not rebuild the buildings, and the small children can not walk upstairs.*

Special education teacher's view³²

The Special Education Teacher is trained in a few short courses. She has 10 years experience of teaching children with mental retardation. Her unit is given a good classroom on ground level, which is a prerequisite for children with severe mobility problems. She says that the training has given her confidence to promote inclusion and *I try to include as many children as possible in the ordinary classes..., most children that we thought earlier could not get education can get it in ordinary classes. In the unit we can take care of the difficult cases.* Discussing inclusive education is something new to the teacher but that inclusion *must mean what the word means, and what I am doing here, the children who can shall go in ordinary classes.* She says that even if she likes to work in the unit because children there are really deprived of everything, she is happy when a child can join an ordinary class. *These children are prepared in the unit to be able to be in a big class... they need to know about school routines.*

Summary

The classroom teachers have no training to teach children who are disabled but are supported by the special education teacher in the special unit. They depend on the peer's supportive work, *we tell children who are better off to be nice and kind and to help.* Children in the

³¹ The interview is done in Sinhalese with an interpreter.

³² The interview is done in English

school usually are more than willing to help. The teacher believes that it will be difficult to continue inclusive education for children who can not climb the stairs. *We can not rebuild the schools that way. There is no space for lower buildings.*

The principal in U2 has a favorable position as he does not need to compete with examination results to keep up to a national standard, as his school is in a poor disadvantaged area. The principal is in favor of involving the special education teacher both in the special education unit and for helping inclusive education work, and he thinks that inclusive education is *to host even children with disabilities in the classes.*

The special education teacher has long experience teaching children with mental retardation, but has no formal special education training and she thinks that most children, that earlier could not get education, can now get it in ordinary classes. In the unit they teach children with more severe disabilities.

Children take the responsibility to help their peers when needed and they share reading material. Children do not see a disability as a hinder for togetherness. They distinguish between teasing and 'bullying' each other, that *to 'bull' is to be bad.*

U3

U3 has about 4000 students and is a Prestigious³³ National Secondary Education Girl school in the City. The competition for enrollment is high and many students come from provinces far from the school as they get scholarships to attend. As in all schools in the City this one is built on a small area in several floors. The enrolment is dependent upon subjects selected by the girls in the different grades which determines the number of students in the different classes. There is no special education teacher or unit in the school, and only one student, Surangani, with a disability in grade 11.

Surangani in the class-room

The classroom is on the top floor and therefor bright, cool and windy. Surangani sits next to the window in the first row. She has a specially designed wooden-desk constructed so she can master all her books and tasks with her feet. The first lesson I observe is Philosophy. The teacher discusses with the girls, and all of them are active responding,

³³ So called 'Prestigious schools' are schools considered to have high academic standards and children compete to enter them.

not least Surangani. The lesson shifts character after 30 minutes, and during the latter part the girls take notes. Surangani writes with her feet, and the teacher follows her writing to adjust her speed in dictating.

The second lesson is Logistic and the pattern of teaching is slightly different but divided into two parts, discussions with reflections and taking notes. During the third lesson the girls study Japanese using textbooks and Surangani turns the pages with her toes. During my observations she does not need help, but has the teacher's attention. During all sessions all the girls are very attentive to everything said by the teacher and by peers, and there is no interaction between the students.

Surangani's story

When I was small I was left in an institution by my parents because they did not want to have anything to do with me. I was lucky because I got help from the sisters in the Convent. They helped me to learn to do everything that other people do, but I do it with my feet.

I: Is there something you can't learn to do by yourself, you think?
Giggles from Surangani. No, I do not think so. The only thing I can not learn is to walk on my hands... Most people stare at me.

I: Can you give me an example?

S: E.g. when I take up my 'busfare' with my toes from my shoe and pay... I keep my money in my shoes... but not in school.

She feels that she is accepted when she is in school and that her classmates support her as soon as she needs support, but *I do not remember when it was last time*. She does not feel that she has any difficulties with schoolwork except when she must ask the teacher to repeat certain things so she does *not miss out notes*. Sometimes she borrows her friends' notes *to check that everything is there*.

Surangani and her Peers³⁴

The classmates fully accept Surangani, *we have learnt that people are different and still capable... we tease each other in the same way all of us*. Surangani does not need help with anything. She might be slow taking notes sometimes, *but that is good for us also because we can adjust our own notes*.

³⁴ The interviews with the girls were done in English.

I: But if you had to have a classmate who has other problems such as deafness, blindness or multiply disabilities what should you do then?

After much discussion where the girls speak Sinhalese³⁵ with each other the answer is some new questions:

How could we talk with a person who is deaf? How could a person who can not walk climb the stairs, how could he learn our subjects? Blind, yes we do not think that such person will be a problem for us but for the teachers because of that she needs Braille.

Class teacher's view³⁶

There is no problem teaching Surangani who has a physical disability. She asks herself when she needs more time or a task repeated for taking her notes³⁷. *That's the only difficulty she has as she has no arms and writes with her feet, or should I say toes.* The teacher points out that she thinks that Surangani is clever and Surangani is accepted by everyone because of who she is. She does not think that there are other children with disabilities or severe special needs of any kind in the school, and children who have difficulties should not be in a school with high demands. The teacher is convinced that all teachers involved in teaching Surangani respect her. She has never heard about inclusive education and wonders *is it when several subjects are taught by one teacher who relates one to the other?*

Principal's view³⁸

The principal is new to the school, and she has not thought about what it means to have children with special educational needs or disabilities enrolled. She has never heard about inclusive education. She does not believe that it would be possible to practice inclusion in her school *here examination results count. How do other schools with these children do?* She is worried about a few girls who might have more severe problems than the school can manage. *Can such children really keep up with the others?*

Summary

In U3 inclusive education is not seen as a possibility because the school is highly competitive *here examination results count*. One teacher expresses that her school is *a school with high demands*. The principal

³⁵ All these girls have Sinhalese as their mother tongue but speak English very well. This includes Chantilatta.

³⁶ The interview is done in English

³⁷ The students have few books and rely on the teacher's oral information from which the students take notes throughout the lessons.

³⁸ The interview with the principal is done in Sinhalese and translated into English.

has never heard about inclusive education and she is doubtful that such a situation is possible to manage. Surangani is enrolled as a result of her high academic performance in combination with efforts made by the institution where she is brought up. *Surangani is accepted by everyone because of who she is.*

Surangani feels accepted and safe in school and her classmates support her as soon as she needs support.

U4

U4 is a Primary and Secondary Boy school in Colombo area with some 5000 students. This school has a spacious compound with sports- and playground. There are a few one floor buildings for the youngest primary school children. For the older children in primary education, and up to grade 12 the buildings have several floors. The different age groups are separated from each other by different arrangements of walls but with open hallways. The school has a long history of accepting academically well functioning children who are blind into ordinary classes. This started during the earlier part of 1970s when itinerant teachers for the blind were trained, translated subject books into Braille, and helped students to learn to read and write Braille. In the beginning of the 1980s one of the first special units in Sri Lanka for teaching students with mental retardation started in this school. An unknown number of boys with disabilities are now included in ordinary classes. Six boys have been transferred from the special unit to different classes during the last two years.

Luxman in grade six

Luxman, in grade six, is much taller and much more sturdy than his classmates. He sits at the end of the class. A reading session is in progress. Luxman reads when his turn comes. He stands up and reads in high-pitched voice, which is considerably different from his classmates. There are no signs of distress or laughs from them. He answers several of the teacher's questions as do the other children. The teacher does not check on him more than on the others, but she is attentive to all children who have problems following the lesson. No direct interaction of any kind can be noticed between the children. Luxman gets a task to complete on the blackboard. He makes his explanation in his different voice and his peers listen carefully to him. The lesson continues with deskwork. Luxman does not initiate contact with his peers but a peer next to him consults him several times and

gets his help. His high-pitched voice carries the sound 'around the class' but nobody is disturbed by it.

Luxman and his peers

The boys stay in the classroom, some talking to each other, and others looking at what is going on. When the boys are asked why they do not go out, one says that the break is too short. Luxman does not do much during the breaks because he is tired which was not noticeable during lesson. He says, *I leave home early in the morning to be here when school starts. I live in K-town and have to take the bus at 6 o'clock. Sometimes it is difficult because I must first go by bike. I think it is 6 or 7 kilometers...when it's raining it is difficult.* He was rejected from enrollment in his hometown. *They said it was too difficult to enroll somebody like me. They are not used...here they are used...* He says that sometimes the young boys who do not know him tease him. The peers do not think that there is a problem that boys are different. There are many in school. *There are those who can not walk in the class up there (point in the direction where the special education unit is situated) and others in many classes.* Responding to my question if they ever tease those who are different, they look down not wanting to answer. After discussion they admit, *we have done it...sometimes.*

Class teacher's view

The teachers do not have any special training for children with disabilities, but receive support from the special education teacher when they ask for it. Last time Luxman's teacher worked with the special education teacher was when the last child was transferred to her class which was about one year ago. The teacher thinks that *inclusion is what we do - have children who can manage by themselves in ordinary classes.* She has three children in her class who were earlier in the special unit. They are all very different e.g. *Luxman is one of these children who had a bad start in his life but has come to be a very good student... because he makes great efforts to learn.* Even if he is different the other children do not make fun of him. When asked if all children in school like him, she thinks that he probably has a tuff time with the small ones... *bad tendencies have to be stopped soon.* The teacher believes that inclusion is successful if the principal has good attitudes and understands that all children can not do well in examinations.

Principal's view

The principal supports the special education teacher but *I do not need to interfere, as she is capable for many tasks... Not many teachers have a B.Ed exam.* He does not know the exact number of students with spe-

cial educational needs, but only that there are six children that have been transferred from the special unit to ordinary classes. Those are the children registered by the education office. He thinks that probably there are 50 or more children with more severe disabilities *such as C.P³⁹... and other that I have no names for.* These children are only registered as children in the school. He knows that one of the children this year sits for the scholarship exam for entering upper secondary education. The principal means that inclusion is what the school always has done long before he was the principal. *The only difference is that the severity of disability is still increasing or we might not have been ready for the severe ones before.* He thinks that inclusion succeeds if there are good teachers but that the separate unit is a necessity even in the future.

Special Education Teacher's view⁴⁰

The special education teacher is in charge of a unit with 12 students who have severe special educational needs. The unit is in a separate house on the compound, and has two small classrooms with five children in one and seven in the other. Many parents remain in the class to assist the teacher while she is working with support to ordinary class-teachers. The teacher is specialized in mentally retardation. She has passed the B.Ed⁴¹ examination. *This focused on the importance of community and solidarity... of the importance to accept all children..* She says that as soon as a boy is ready to be included in an ordinary class they take action. The school gets more and more severely disabled children for the unit. She means that inclusion is to accept children into ordinary classes that U4 does, and that success will happen if all teachers accept all children.

Luxman's Parents' view

No interviews with parents were done in connection to the school visit. I met later with Luxman's parents who were satisfied with the situation even if their son has a long way to school because first he travel on bike, and after that he takes three busses. He is often tired when coming back home. They confirm Luxman's information that no school in their province enrolled him when he was small because of his strange appearance. The parents do not know what their boy can do later in life *but he can read and write and manage by himself.* They think that he is lucky that has had the opportunity to learn with other children. They never hear him complain about his situation or his

³⁹ C.P. is short for Cerebral Palsy.

⁴⁰ Conversation is held in English.

⁴¹ B. Ed. short for Bachelor in Special Education, which has been carried out in co-operation between NIE, Sri Lanka and Göteborg University, Sweden.

classmates. If he has comments they are always positive. They also appreciate the teachers *they make a great difference to these children's lives.*

Summary

U4 has a long history of accepting children with disabilities in school. Many children with severe disabilities are enrolled in the special education unit, and many children with disabilities are enrolled in ordinary classes. Six boys have been transferred from the unit to different classes during the last two years. Many parents remain in the unit to help the special education teacher carry out the planned tasks while she is working with support to ordinary class-teachers. She thinks that success with inclusive education will happen if all teachers accept all children.

The principal supports education of children with disabilities both in ordinary classes and in the unit. He does not think there is a need for categorization to be enrolled, and he only keeps special records on the children who are referred by the education office in the city and therefore he can not say how many children are included in ordinary classes. The principal means that inclusion is what the school always has done long before he came there. He thinks that inclusion succeeds if there are good teachers but that a separate unit is a necessity even in the future because all children can not go in ordinary classes, *what shall they do there?*

Luxman was denied enrollment when he was small because no school in his province enrolled children with a strange appearance. Even if he is very different he feels accepted by teachers and students, and he says that sometimes the small children who are not used to him tease him. The teacher means that Luxman is different but the other children respect him... *they do not make fun of him.., he probably has a tuff time with the small ones...* She highlights the importance of the principals attitudes and U4 has a *good principal who understands that all children can not do well in examination.* She also thinks that parents must support their children, and that children must help each other.

Luxman's parents are pleased because now he is accepted and might even pass the next *scholarship exam.... the school makes a great difference to these children's lives.*

Four Rural Schools R1 – R4

R1

This school with an enrollment of 2000 students is situated about 100 km from Colombo, and has primary and lower secondary education⁴². It is situated in a hilly countryside and has many buildings built on platforms with stairs between each building. It is the only school in the area. There is a special education unit to support children with special educational needs of different kinds. The unit has a small classroom without windows in the last building from the entrance, on top of the hill next to the toilet area, and there is distance to walk up the hill.

The unit serves as a resource room for four children with different disabilities (visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning problems/mental retardation) all referred by the education authority of the province. One child, Chantilatta, with Down syndrome is seen as too complicated to teach in an ordinary class. She is the last child enrolled. The three other children with special needs get all their education in ordinary classrooms. There are a number of children with minor disabilities or special educational needs that are not registered as disabled in the school.

Chantilatta

On my arrival Chantilatta is in the ordinary classroom with 42 children. The classroom is organized in groups of seven to nine students in each. Chantilatta sits at the back of one group with 9 students. She has her back to the teacher, and the teacher does not interact with her at any time. Chantilatta does not interact with any of her peers and they ignore her. When the lesson is over the special education teacher comes to collect her. As soon as she sees him she leaves her place and walks to him taking his hand to walk away to the resource room. On arrival the teacher gives her some material. Chantilatta does not react. The teacher talks to her but receives no verbal response but she 'answers' by looking at him seeking eye contact. He does not notice though that she communicates in alternative ways. After discussion about communication and me initiating communication with Chantilatta he understands that he needs more training especially about communication. He does not know where he could receive this

⁴² Lower secondary education is year 7 – to year 10.

training. The supervisor at the regional office can not help him *he is trained for blind education, can do nothing about this problem.*

During intervals Chantilatta sits at the top of the stairs looking down over the buildings and playground. Nobody comes asking for her and she does not ask anybody for anything. At the end of the day the special education teacher takes the girl by the hand and brings her to the gate where her mother meets her.

Ordinary class-teacher's view

None of the teachers have any special training but the teacher feels that she gets support from the special education teacher and sometimes from the supervisor sent by the regional office of education. The supervisor *is a man who is studying the subject now for many years.* She thinks that there is not much problem with teaching children who are blind because they understand. The most difficult is teaching children with learning problems or mental retardation because they can not keep up with work. It is important that children do well in school as the examination results count.

Principal's view

The principal means that he has to enroll all children, as there is no other school in the area, and it is the government's policy. The Principal supports the special education unit and discusses with the provincial supervisor about the children's progress and what will be the next step that he must take. He is interested in inclusive education but thinks that it is too much to let children who have too severe difficulties in learning be accommodated in ordinary classes, *It is too much for the teacher and nobody here is actually trained for them.* Children who are visually impaired should be enrolled in ordinary classes because they are good in learning. He finds it difficult with children who have physical disabilities because of the hilly landscape where steps can not be avoided and children can in such cases not walk the whole way up to the unit, *What do we do with children who can not walk at all? We will have to tell them that we can't take them.* He thinks that it is not possible to rearrange class-rooms for the different grades. *What would the reaction of others be? We do not have space enough for all children as it is. We must also keep up the examination results and those children need to be down here. They take a lot of responsibility for extra curricula activities⁴³.*

⁴³ Extra curricula activities are special subjects or activities that children can choose.

Special education teacher's view

The teacher has specialist training in the education of children who are blind. He has had a few training-courses and thinks he understands the concept inclusive education. He means that the variation of disabilities that the children have makes it hard for him to do all his duties. *Braille, ear-mould checking, and this and that.* Chantilatta who is a newcomer to the school causes him difficulties, as he does not know much about how to teach children with mental retardation. He thinks that the biggest problem for inclusion is how to include Chantilatta in the class she should be in. The other three children are in their classes and he is constantly helping them but during morning sessions he must try to do his best to stimulate Chantilatta. He thinks that the most difficult is that the ordinary teachers do not know how to adjust curricula. He is supporting the ordinary class teachers as much as he can.

Chantilatta's Mother's view

The mother is happy about Chantilatta being able to go to school; *before she did not get any education. Now she has improved a lot at home. She helps with a lot of household work. Earlier she did nothing. She is happy in school ... if not she would protest.* Chantilatta has only been in school a few months. It was the supervisor at the provincial education office who told her that she could get Chantilatta enrolled. The mother hopes that Chantillata will be as independent as possible.

Summary

The school is the only one in the area, and therefore the principal has a higher obligation to enroll children than if there were several schools. He supports inclusive education reluctantly because *we must also keep up the examination.* Children who are blind can be included *because they are good in learning.* but it is too much to let children who have severe difficulty in learning be in ordinary classes. He does not see any possibility to rearrange the classrooms to make it easier for children to enter their peer-groups.

The class teacher believes that there is little problem teaching students who are blind because they understand everything and do their work well. The most difficult is to teach children with learning problems or mental retardation. He believes that it is important that children do well in school as the examination results count.

The special education teacher means that the variation of disabilities that the children enrolled have makes it hard for him to do all his

duties and that it is difficult because ordinary teachers can not adjust the curriculum.

The mother thinks that *before she did not get any education. Now she has improved a lot at home.*

R2

This school with some 500 students is a primary school for boys and girls. The building has one floor and is situated on the compound of the village church on the beach. The population is mainly fisherman who themselves live in huts of bamboo and leaves built directly on the beach.

R2 is dark inside as it has been built to protect the students from the heavy winds that often sweep in from the sea, and from the extreme heat. Next to one of the doors the first grade students have their space. The students sit in groups of 35 - 40 individuals with their backs to adjacent groups and the teacher's desk is in front of the class.

A special education teacher comes to the school a few days each week to support the children who have visual problems⁴⁴. The boy, Rohan, needs adjustment of teaching material. A number of children with mild learning problems are identified but were not referred by education authorities and as such not counted as children with special educational needs. Some children drop out of school because the parents do not care and do not show interest in their children's learning.

Rohan in year one

There are about 35 children in the class. The children are doing desk-work and the teacher is walking around checking how work is going on and helping some children. She gives more attention to five of them including Rohan frequently stopping at their desks. During the session the teacher passes Rohan six times, and Rohan turns around trying to allocate the teacher by listening to her voice, but he does not make any vocal sounds. The teacher notices his communication but does not rush to his seat but walks towards him passing the other children who need her help. He does not interact or disturb other

⁴⁴ Teachers moving between schools are called itinerant teachers and are usually trained teachers of the blind. During about 10 - 15 years, (at least between 1965 to 1975) blind children were the only children with disabilities who received education. These children were few in numbers and a teacher could not be placed in a school serving one child only and thus the system of itinerant teachers was developed. These teachers were during these early years provided with a motorbike, which made the profession attractive.

children. The special education teacher is not available in the school this morning. When the teacher says that the lesson is over Rohan puts his book and pencil into his schoolbag and runs out of class along with all children.

Rohan and his peers

The peers see Rohan as 'only a friend' whom they play with. They do not see any special difference between him and them. Rohan does not use glasses as *the pair I had broke*. He does not think he needs glasses, at least not outside when he is playing. There is a difference when it is sharp sunshine and in the dark classroom *where it is difficult to see the letters*. Rohan does not see how the friends can help in class. At home he plays with the same children who are his peers in school. School is a place to learn but he does not like it very much. He goes there because of his friends and because the special education teacher comes to help him.

Class teacher's view

Rohan is in the first grade and his teacher has placed him almost next to the door in the first row because the special education teacher has told her that Rohan needs light due to his visual problem. She means that the school might be too dark for him but there is no other primary school in the area. The teacher thinks that Rohan is doing well and she is happy that he does not need Braille because she does not know it. There are a few children with more severe learning problems in the class and still more in the school. Some of them drop out very early. The teacher has never thought about a special class for these children but if very severe damaged children start the matter might change. She has seen a special school for deaf children and believes that these children or children who are retarded must be placed in a separate school or class because of the other children *who will not be nice to them*.

Principal's view

On my arrival the principal is teaching in one of the classes because many teachers are absent. He says that the school belongs to the poorer category of disadvantaged schools. His teachers are often absent because they have to attend to personal things e.g. children or other family members who are ill. Many children drop out of school early after enrollment, as their parents are poor and have no means to send their children. He does not connect the absentees and drop outs to poor teaching that does not necessary bring about the desired side effects of learning e.g. increased self-reliance and empowerment, *children are not used to other kinds of teaching and do not see the teaching as*

boring. Instead he believes that children must stay home and help parents with their smaller siblings. Another reason might be that children do not have any interest in learning. He sees inclusion of children with more severe special educational needs as *a difficult task unless integration in special classes could be accepted instead, at least for certain groups of children*.

Special education teacher's view

The special education teacher has been employed as an itinerant teacher for 'blind' education for 9 years. He moves between two schools. There is usually not a problem to include children who are visually impaired in classes as the provision of books and Braille writers are satisfactory. The two boys he is supporting in the two schools are doing well. He understands that he must get more training, *I have applied for the B.Ed. course but I am never selected*. He also needs support from a supervisor who has relevant skills to be able to understand how to include children with other disabilities than visual impairment. The most difficult thing is that he works alone. He knows that there is further short training for special education teachers but he has not been invited.

Summary

In this school the class-teacher gives more attention to children with special educational needs by stopping at their desks to help and support them while walking around. The child with a severe visual problem is placed next to the entrance because there is better light there. Children often drop out of school. The teacher thinks that it is better for children who are deaf or mentally retarded to go to special schools *because of the other children who will not be nice to them*.

The principal does not connect children's poor interest in learning to poor teaching *children are not used to other kinds of teaching and do not see teaching as boring*. He is in favor of the establishment of special classes for children with other disabilities but the visually impaired.

The special education teacher is of the same opinion as the principal and he thinks that it is difficult for him to promote inclusion into education unless he gets support.

The peers mean that there is no problem playing with the boy with a visual problem, *he has some problems with his eyes... a teacher is coming sometimes helping him*. Rohan goes to school because of the friends and because the special education teacher comes to help him.

R3

This school has about 300 students and is a primary and lower secondary school in a remote village. The schoolyard is spacious with a lot of room for playing, which is unique for Sri Lanka. The school has many one-floor buildings, and in each several teachers are teaching in open classrooms. According to the principal the number of students ranges between 20 - 60 in the different grades depending on the numbers who started school a certain year. The parents of the children in school are mainly small-scale farmers and many are very poor but most are keen on education.

A special education unit has just started. The special education director who is trained in teaching children who are blind gave the directive that if the school was to be granted a special education teacher such a unit must start. There are no children permanently enrolled in the unit. Instead there is a large number of children with different disabilities or learning problems in each grade.

Suwinitha in second grade

There are 21 students in the second grade classroom. In this building there are three classes, each with a teacher. The classes are arranged with the desks in groups. In year two, three children with special educational needs are enrolled. All of them are said to have mental retardation. Two of them have repeated second grade twice. The third girl, Suwinitha, with Down syndrome, came to school only a few weeks ago and sits among the other classmates in the front group seen from the teacher's point of view. Mathematics is on the timetable. Suwinitha is sawing with needle and thread some colored cardboard-parts to make a box. She is eagerly concentrating on her work and the teacher comes to her seat to give feedback with about 5 minutes in between the visits during the 20 minutes lesson. Her classmates are doing their tasks in their exercise books, and the teacher visits each desk about three times. There is no interaction between the students.

During the first part of the second lesson, when the teacher introduces a new task, Suwinitha is not concentrating but only looking around. She looks twice towards my corner, she looks to the next class, she pokes her frock, picks her nose, and tries to get attention from her peers without succeeding. After about 10 minutes introduction children are given deskwork. As soon as Suwinitha gets her work she looks for some time at her task and then looks at the teacher. At the same time the teacher checks if everyone has understood the task.

Then she watches Suwutitha until she lifts up her face looking at the teacher. The teacher asks if she wants help and she nods her head. The teacher stays with her explaining the task and does not leave before Suwunitha starts to work. All children in class are concentrating on their work, and there are no interference or interaction between them.

Suwunitha and her peers

It is a very hot day and most children go out of the buildings to the spacious ground during intervals. Many sit under the trees chatting. A group of boys plays soccer with a plastic ball. Some children stroll to the school-gate to buy something to drink. Suwunitha accompanies a taller girl from the same class, Malkanthi, one of the students with special educational needs, to a hillock where they sit down. One of the girls approaching me has only one leg and she walks on her hands. Talking to Suwunitha's peer I mention that she is tall and she tells me that she has been in the class for many years. She tells me that Suwunitha has just started school. The following conversation takes place:

I: How do you like being in the class?

Suwunitha: Like it.

I: Why do you like being in school?

S:mmm.

I: What do you like?

S: Like?

I: Yes, what do you like doing in school?

S:

Malkanthi: She likes it as she comes every day.

I: And what about you?

M: Yes I like it to.

I: Is it not difficult?

M: It is....but it is good to learn.

I: What shall you do with all you learn?

M: I don't know.. maybe I can become teacher.

I: And what about your teacher?

M: She is good to all of us...she is new.

I: Suwunitha, what do you think of the teacher?

S: Good.

I: How is she when she is good?

S:.....

I: How do you come to school Suwunitha?

S: Mother.

I: So mother follows you. Do you keep company with some peers sometimes?

M: No, she does not. Her mother comes every day.

.....

I: Are there other children in school who are disabled and who need special care from you and from the teachers? (The children are quiet for a long time looking at me and the interpreter who repeats the question)

Wijesinghe⁴⁵: It should be Priyani who has only one leg. (looks around) Come Priyani (Priyani who is standing in the crowd approaches).

I: Hi Priyani. I am admiring you running around the ground on your hands. Don't you think that it is difficult?

P: That is the easiest way for a girl without one leg.

The peers describe the place where Suwunitha lives, *out in the paddy field and only big boys stay there*. They assume that big boys can not keep company with a small girl and furthermore she finishes school earlier than the boys. Discussions about afternoon activities gives the information that children do not play much as they have to do household work, looking after their small brothers and sisters, and doing homework. The peers testify that nobody is bad to anybody in the village and all in the village know each other well.

Ordinary class-teacher's view

The teachers have no special training but are supported with planning lessons and adjusting the curriculum by the special education teacher. An extra teacher who is not trained, but hopes to be able to enter the training college soon, says that she is now used to seeing all kinds of children in school. *Earlier there were some children with learning problems. They dropped out...we let them*. She thinks that all teachers now appreciate children as they are, and understand that all children can not reach high academic standards. She gives the credit for the new approach to the principal *who is against separation of students*. The teacher feels that inclusion gives a nice new experience, and wants to do the best she can even if she might not be prepared to have children who are too different i.e. children who can not talk and walk in her class.

Principal's view

The principal sees the unit as a concession to the special education director who insists upon a special education unit to obtain approval

⁴⁵ One of the peers.

for a special education teacher, but the principal encourage teachers to have the children in their class. She has attended a one-day course for principals so she knows what she is aiming at. *I think it is only if children have severe behavior problems they need to go to the unit for some time. ...and some children need a teacher without other children sometimes. When the supervisor said that these children should be in a unit I did not find it right. ...It was not natural.* Children are not allowed to be bad to each other, and one of the social aspects is that children shall take well care of each other, and help each other. She is proud of her school and that they now enroll all children in the neighborhood area.

Special Education teacher's view⁴⁶

The teacher was trained for inclusive education by the provincial core-team in a short 10 days course. She was earlier class-teacher in the school, and is now functioning as resource teacher for all the classes, *when some children need it, teach in the unit sometimes, children do not feel so good and at such times they need the isolation, that is for all children.* The teacher does not see any serious problem between children who have special educational needs and other children, and she has skills in conflict resolution, which is one part of the training-course for inclusive education. She feels that her work is demanding and interesting. *To have many children with many different needs is a new concept to Sri Lanka and needs a lot of support to succeed.* She thinks that she 'is the support' for her school and will try to support the ordinary class teachers in such a way that they will not give up and will feel that they are doing well.

Suwunitha's Mother

Suwunitha's mother is waiting for her most days. Sometimes other family-members collect her, and once in a while she is followed by one of the older students of the school due to other duties or practical matters that the mother has to attend to, *I have also other children even if they are married.* The mother hopes that eventually her daughter will be able to walk to and from school without special arrangements. There is very little traffic on the road, and maybe by next year she will try to let the girl walk back herself. The mother wishes *that she will be able to manage by herself* and that she will learn something in school. The situation at home has become much better since Suwunitha has started school, *because now she does things like sweeping the floor.* The girl was earlier passive doing nothing.

⁴⁶ In Rural School NR 3 all interviews were done in English.

Summary

The acceptance of children who have disabilities is high in U 3, and the positive attitudes promote children to come to school, *she likes it as she comes every day*. There are a number of children who traditionally have not been enrolled. The class teacher says, *I am now used to seeing all kinds of children in school. Earlier there were some children with learning problems. They dropped out...we let them*. According to the teacher it is the principal who should be given the credit for the new approach as *she is against separation of students*.

The principal sees the newly opened unit as a concession to the special education director who demands a special educational unit in order to approve a teacher for special education, but the principal encourages teachers to keep the children in their classes. *I think it is only if children have severe behavior problems they need to go to the unit for some time*. The unit can be good for all children at times. She does not allow children to be bad to each other. The special education teacher is functioning as resource-teacher for all the classes. Support is needed to implement inclusive education and she 'is the support' for her school.

The mother expresses her joy with her daughter's enrollment by explaining that the situation has become much better at home because the daughter has become more active.

R4

This school has more than 3000 students and is situated in the major city of the province. The school enrolls many students with special educational needs such as children who are visually impaired, have hearing impairments and mild learning problems. During the last years children who are mentally retarded have been enrolled into ordinary classes. The special education teacher, who is trained for teaching children with visual impairment, tries to support all teachers involved with children having special educational needs.

The school has a small special education unit equipped with special teaching aids such as e.g. Braille-writer but children are not enrolled in the unit on a permanent basis. Instead all student with special educational needs belong to ordinary classes, and the teachers are given support by the special education teacher. There are some 20 students with more severe special educational needs in the school and

a number of not counted children who must have extra help by the teachers.

Wijekoon in seventh grade

There are 49 students in the seventh grade. Wijekoon sits in the third row in a classroom with little space between the students. He does not differ much from the other children during the lessons. He does his tasks but it is seldom, only once in 2 times 30 minutes, that he seeks the teacher's attention by volunteering to answer questions. When he is asked something by the teacher, which happens four times, he stands up but answers only once with one word.

Wijekoon and his peers

Wijekoon leaves the classroom with two other boys. He is loud, making a lot of noise, and doing something which looks similar to stereotype behavior and 'flipping' with his arms and hands. One of the other boys seems to copy his behavior and a third peer is watching for a while and then laughs and leaves but comes back soon. Some students are passing the two who are standing 'flipping' but take no special notice of them. When I ask where the boys are going Piyasena says that *nowhere, just waiting for next class*. I ask if he would like to chat with me about school.

I: How is life in school?

Piyasena: Good.

I: What do you mean by good?

P: We learn a lot and are trying hard for the examination.

I: So you learn for exam?

P: Yes.

I: Is that the only reason why you go to school? (nods head) Do you think that all students are learning for exam?...What will you do with your exam? (no answer).. What will you do when you finish school?

P: I do not know.

I turn to Wijekoon.

I: May I speak with you also? ('Flipping' stops)

.....

I: How do you like it here in school?

W: Good.

I: What do you mean...what is good with school?

.....

I: Tell me what you are doing now.

W: Interval.

I: Do you do other things (but standing here) during interval?

W: No, I do not think so.
P: Yes sometimes.
I: What do you do then?
P: Have something to drink from the kiosk or.... Not much to do.
I: Tell me how you like the school.
W: Good.
I:....and the peers.
W: Good.
I: Do you have a friend whom you like best?
W: I do not think so.
I: What about you Piyasena... and your friends?
P: The boys are OK all.
I: If I should tease you a bit would you be angry with me?
P: No, I don't think so.
I: ..and you Wijekoon, would you be angry?
W: No.
I: ...and if your friend here (points to the boy who stands next to them) would tease you?
W: No (and P nods his head)
I: What do people do when they tease each other?
P: They tell stories which are not true.
W: May take something from you... and give it back.
The third boy: ...or do as you do (flips his hands).
I: If you are bulling what do you do then?
Third boy: That is when you are nasty to somebody.
Fourth boy approaching listening and answering: They always stand here together.
I: Always?
P: *Not* always but when we are free.
I: What do you think about that? (turning to the fourth boy)
Fourth boy: It's strange. He disturbs by fooling around. This does not happen in class. It is always at intervals. When he works he is working.
I: Does it disturb you?
Fourth boy: Not much... I do not look much. I do not think that none of the boys look at them.
Third boy: It looks strange.... As a sort of magic.

The boys accept the behavior. The students let Piyasena and Wijekoon alone but sometimes they tease them. The boy's strange movements draw peer's attention and some like to copy them. The third boy informs that *when the principal or teachers come they always tells the boys to stop this behavior.*

Class-teacher's view

A few of the ordinary class-teachers, have been to short courses in special education carried out by the provincial core-team. The training gave an understanding of what inclusive education is and how to teach with the help of some special teaching methods. The teacher found the training useful and learnt how to involve students in keeping peace. In the school they have become more aware of the importance of seeing that children feel good. The children with problems seem to be accepted by the other children, *we were worried that they should be 'bullied' by the others but it does not seem so.*

Principal's view

The principal supports the idea of a separate unit for children with mental retardation. *I am doubtful about the new trend to include children with mental retardation in the ordinary classes. I now have some experience. See the boy in seventh grade. He has a very strange behavior especially during intervals.* The principal has no report of strange behavior during lessons. He believes there is no problem including children who are blind because they are clever. Children with minor learning problems can be in ordinary classes only during primary classes. He believes that in secondary school there is too much competition. *I must also have good examination results for the school. This school takes scholars from the whole province.*

Special education teacher's view⁴⁷

The special education teacher is trained in the education of blind children. He does not see any difficulty in including children with visual impairment as I am special trained for it, or minor learning difficulties because such children have always gone to school, but sees children who are deaf as a major problem *how can we communicate with them?* The same difficult situation occurs when mentally retarded children are to be included in ordinary classes *their behavior is nothing known to us and they can not learn as other children.* He has too many children to help, *before all teachers accept all children we should not enroll more in ordinary classes.* He understands that he must try to work on keeping all children in ordinary classes *not only those who are clever.*

Summary

The principal supports the idea of a separate unit for children with mental retardation *I am doubtful about the new trend to include children*

⁴⁷ All interviews in Rural School NR 4 were done with help of interpreter.

with mental retardation in the ordinary classes. He now has some experience and his school has too much of competition I must also have good examination results for the school. The class-teacher says that they have become more aware of the importance to see that children feel good in school. Children with problems seem to be accepted by the other children, we were worried that they should be 'bulled' by the others but it does not seem.

The special education teacher sees children who are deaf as a major problem because of communication difficulties. Mentally retarded children also make up a difficult group.

The Eight Schools in Comparative Perspective

I have presented an inclusive education case study from eight schools in Sri Lanka, four from urban and four from rural areas. When analyzing the empirical material I have used an hermeneutic inspired approach to reveal the meaning of and illuminate different views of the phenomenon inclusive education. I have emphasized similar and distinctive features and variations between the different schools and between urban and rural schools, finding answers on how inclusion is understood by teachers and principals, and if exclusion or rejection is taken for granted or applied to certain groups of categorized students. My intention has also been to understand what peers with- and without disability think of peers that are contrasting themselves and what parents of children with disability think about their children's enrollment in ordinary classrooms.

The pendulum between different levels of understanding inclusive education illuminates different aspects of the phenomenon through my interpretation. In the following I present some analysis and interpretation where I compare differences in approaches in the eight schools. When appropriate I make comments and point out possible future actions.

School Buildings and Supportive Environments

The physical construction of buildings can have a bearing on how or if inclusive education is accepted by the school staff or not. Access to school buildings suitable for children with different kind of physical disabilities is a precondition for implementing inclusive education for the majority of children. In none of the schools did principals and teachers make comments about the need to adjust school buildings as

one requirement for successful inclusion. Even where school buildings are relatively new, no special adjustments have been discussed, made, or are expected to be made to enable the enrollment of students with physical disabilities. One obstacle in U1 is the many multi-floor buildings with high and narrow stairs. The special education teacher at U2 thinks it would be difficult to enroll children in a higher grade if that child can not 'climb the stairs'⁴⁸, *...we can not rebuild the schools that way. There is no space for lower buildings*, and in U4 the same idea manifest itself in the following way, *such children will be difficult to include in classes, as they can not walk*. In R1 though, there are one-floor buildings but still it is considered as impossible to change the location of the classrooms so children with difficulties in walking could have easier access to education *that cannot be done. What would the reaction of others' be? We do not have space enough for all children as it is. We must also keep up the examination results and those children need to be down here. They take a lot of responsibility for extra curricula activities*⁴⁹.

In only one school, R3, is the school staff prepared to let all children be enrolled. All the school's classrooms are at ground level which should not be ignored when looking for reasons for the more positive attitude in accepting children with disabilities. More likely though is that the matter is of attitudinal character.

From the background literature it is understood that (e.g. Emanuelsson, 1995, 1996; Stubbs, 1995; López 1994, 1995) the adaptation of physical environments seems to be of less importance than the attitudes of staff. The staff at R3 would probably find ways round physical problems, as the principal is proud that her school enrolls all children from the neighborhood area. It appears that little change will happen in R1 and this seems to depend on a less positive inclusive education culture than on the design of buildings. Not much visible physical change in favor of inclusive education in the different classrooms is taking place nor is adjustment of teaching material done for children with disabilities. In U3 though a specially built desk has been placed in the classroom for Surangani so she will be able to work⁵⁰. Otherwise it is more common to place children with disabilities together with supportive friends as in U1, and share teaching material as in U2.

In most of the schools certain groups of children, e.g. those with more severe mental retardation, are pointed out as needing separate educa-

⁴⁸ All school staff and parents involved in this study used the expression 'climb the stairs' for walking upstairs and/or downstairs.

⁴⁹ Extra curricula activities are subjects that children can choose to participate in.

⁵⁰ Staff of the institution where Surangani lives have built the special desk.

tion. When that is the case none of the participating staff reflect on the possibilities of adaptation of the buildings. This unpreparedness hinders even children with milder physical problems from getting an education. This leads to education for children with physical disabilities not happening in ordinary classes wherever the buildings have several floors.

Culture of Inclusion

Neither of the two principals at U1 believe there is a need for special registration of children with disabilities, *as we do not enroll children looking at their disability but finding out what children can do*. Children referred by the central education office in the provinces are always diagnosed as blind, deaf, slow learners, or mentally retarded. The principal at U2 says that *those who are in the unit we always have registered as disabled*, and the U4 principal says for the same reason that, *those are the children registered by the education office*. At the Central Education Office in many cities there is a waiting list of children to be placed into special education units depending on three specific disabilities, blind, deaf or mentally retarded. R3's principal enrolls every child who seeks enrollment, and at R1 consideration is taken to the government's policy of enrolling all children even if the school can not fulfill the obligation. It is a relatively common belief that children who are blind are also doing well in school subjects. In R4 the principal's understanding is that children who have visual problems can be enrolled without problem *visually impaired children have a tendency to learn easier than do other children but there are also children who are mentally retarded and visually disabled but they do not go to school*. Children with minor learning problems can be included during primary education only. These beliefs are the same in R1 and R2 but do not manifest themselves in the urban schools.

Discussions about inclusive education and defining what inclusive education means is limited or non-existent in all eight schools. Staff defines inclusion intuitively as in U1, *the teaching of deaf, blind and mentally retarded children who are taught in ordinary classes*, and in U2 *it must mean what the word means, and what I am doing here... the children who can, shall go in ordinary classes*. The meaning is not clear for most individuals interviewed regardless if they are in an advisory position, have a leading function, or are teachers. At U3 the principal has never heard about inclusive education and wonders *is it when several subjects are taught by one teacher who relates one to the other?* At R1 inclusion in education is seen as *a government policy*. An example of frustration shows up at R3 when the supervisor pressures the principal into

starting a special unit in order for the school to be allowed to keep the short termed trained special education teacher. The principal has a different view than the supervisor, *when the supervisor said that these children should be in a unit I did not find it right. ...it was not natural.* The segregated attitude is probably of the same origin as described in APEID paper presented by the Sri Lanka representative at the conference in Japan, 1994. Here the author held the view that special education *is losing facilities* by adopting inclusive education policy.

Sorting children by ability and grouping them as a part of an administrative separation is common in Sri Lanka. Children with disabilities are often seen as qualitatively different from other children. Many principals and teachers in this study though do not see a need to diagnose children in different disability groups to legitimate separation from general education enrollment nor to enroll them into general education classes.

Interaction in Classrooms and During Intervals

In most of the studied schools there is very little visible or vocal interaction between the children during lessons. The school culture does not permit such obvious interaction during lessons. There are three exceptions where inclusiveness in the classrooms can be seen as the natural culture. U1 is one of them where the boy Dushanka sits among *my best friends on each side*, and in U2 where Sunil and Weerakoon share reading materials with their peers, i.e. books for different subjects. The teacher has placed the students owning textbooks next to the ones without. At U4 there is no signs of distress or laughs from peers when Luxman is reading in his high pitched voice, and a peer next to him consults him several times during the lesson to get help. This natural inclusiveness is interesting given the notion that teachers and principals often think that non disabled children *will not be nice to* those with disabilities, as expressed by the teacher in R2, and by Dissanayake (1982). At R1 Chantilatta's peers seem to ignore her during class, and she also gets most of her education separate from the rest in the unit for special education. The quality of interaction in some classes though is likely to be inhibited due to cultural roles guiding behavior.

During intervals it is only Chantilatta who has nobody to play with. Part of the reason might be that she does not know the children in school because she is a newcomer, or that her behavior is too different from that of other children. Another child in the same school, a boy who is visually impaired, has peers. In all eight schools children

interact with each other during intervals. At R3 Suwinitha, who has severe learning problems, is a newcomer but still experiences that she has friends. Even at U3 where inclusive education is not accepted as a goal for the school Surangani who has severe physical disabilities is seen as just a student among other students and her peers are her friends. As seen from this study interaction and friendship between children with- and without disabilities is happening as a natural action in all eight studied schools but not among all individuals.

The section on literature review about inclusive education reports findings that placement in inclusive settings are the most positive choice for children with disabilities (Gularnick et al 1995; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Meyer & Putnam, 1988). These findings confirm what has been seen from this study where children with disabilities interact frequently with their peers during intervals, in other words have friends and are happy with their situation in their inclusive classrooms. Gjessing (in Haug 1997) found that separate services could even be tragic or catastrophic for children with disabilities, which also some parents in this study indicate would have been the case for their children, if not accepted in their local schools. This is seen in U4 where Luxman would have been without education all together unless enrolled in that school. He says, *we tried but I was not enrolled. They said it was not possible to enroll somebody like me.* He thinks it is difficult because, *they are not used...here they are used...* as the school has a history of accepting children with disabilities. The same attitude is shown in U1, and R3. Even Chantilatta in R1 shows sign of assertiveness. She has started to take a more active role at home initiating interaction and wanting to do things, which probably indicates an interest to take after her peers. She has just started school and though she seems not to have friends the mother notices that she seems happy.

An aspect of interaction is teasing and bullying. From the literature review and from interviews done in this study there is an understanding among school staff and others that children with disabilities should not receive their education with children without disability. It is believed that they are better off receiving their education in a separate setting, due to the risks of being teased or abused. Miles (1985a) found in his Pakistan study that the risks are exaggerated. This study does not find that the children with disabilities feel that they are abused or that they are teased to such an extent that they are troubled by it. On the contrary the ones who take it up feel that teasing is part of school-life and friendship, that teasing is a kind of verbal activity. Teasing is complex, and there are cultural differences. Sometime teasing is even seen as an expression of a child's

competence. According to Eisenberg (1986) this form of talk helps parents to control children and to give them central values in an indirect way. Whether or not this is the case in Sri Lanka, I can not tell, but there is a clear tendency that the children in this study do not feel threatened by teasing. It is merely seen as part of everyday life. Dushanka and his friends in U1 use teasing to create and keep relationships rather than to set the boys apart. At U4 Luxman says that children who do not know him might tease him. At R4 there seems to be a different situation where two boys have very different behavior and here tendencies of rejection can be noticed. Teachers in several of the studied schools are alert for other kinds of abuse and ask children to be nice and kind to each other. Different children have also got different assignments from the teachers in some of the schools. Some children are looking after their peers outside the classroom and others supporting them inside.

Persson (1995) argues that the consequences of special education must lead to interaction as a natural act, and that this must be the responsibility of everyone in the school. This study can not confirm that intentional ways are used to build important relationships which promote inclusion in the eight schools involved, which Moore, Carpenter, and Lewis (1987), and Mason (1995) mean is important for inclusion to happen. In the background chapter called Inclusive Education, Villa et al (1992), Helander (1994), López (1995), Mason (1995) as well as the important UN Convention of the Right of the Child imply that inclusion has a community element in it. With this in mind it is essential that children with disabilities join the nearest school at the same age as their peers and together with their peers. The extension of this thinking is that there should be plans that enable children with disabilities to continue through their school years together with their peers without disability.

Attitudes of School Staff

The two schools U1 and U4 have a relatively long tradition of working with the practice of integrating children with disabilities in ordinary classes. U4 had accepted children who are blind already during 1970 and U1 had started to include children with mental retardation in its classes during the mid 1980s. These actions have created positive attitudes towards children who are different from the so-called 'typical child'. The number of children with disabilities in ordinary classes in U4 is much higher than the principal knows. This is a contrast to U1 where the perception is that a prerequisite for successful inclusion is that parents or guardians participate in class-rooms as assistant

teachers, at least during primary education. Even if both schools are of high national standard it is U1 that has the highest academic reputation because of its high examination results and its subsequent high percentage of university entrances. Also the principal of R4 believes that he has to *have good examination results for the school. This school takes scholars from the whole province.* This is not the situation at U2 where the principal explains that *I do not need to strive for being high up in the hierarchy in the examination results as this school is situated in this economically disadvantaged area.* ... and at R3 where the principal believes that placing children in a unit is not what she wants *did not find it right. ...It was not natural.*

Positive attitudes that are openly expressed and shown by school staff are essential factors when promoting inclusive education because such attitudes communicate themselves to the children (Hill & Rabe 1987, 1994). The principal's attitude colors the view that the entire school has towards inclusion. Kapembwa (1988) warns for the institutionalization of negative attitudes in connection to inclusive education and Emanuelsson (1996) illuminates that positive attitudes shown by teachers, principals, and parents are contributing to counteract segregation.

In the studied schools where inclusive education has been embraced the attitudes are positive. All staff including the principal in U2 has a natural positive attitude to children in difficult situations because most children in school have difficulties of social and economic character... *because most children are facing even greater problems than having learning problems.* This mirrors the attitudes to children with disabilities, and children are used to having problems in their daily life. Staff and children at U1, U2, U4, and R3 where the principals express positive views show more positive attitudes than at R1, R2 and R4 where the principals have more reluctantly accepted inclusive education. At R4 the principal expresses that *I am doubtful about the new trend to include children with mental retardation...see the boy in grade seven. He has a very strange behavior.* In this study there is only one example, U3, where the staff has not reflected on inclusion in education. R1 is an example of a school where the principal and the teachers will need urgent support and training. Here the principal holds the view that children who are visually impaired can be included in ordinary classes *because they are good in learning.* This principal expresses the negative attitudes he has by wanting to expel most children who have learning difficulties or physical disabilities; *We do not have space enough for all children as it is. We must also keep up the examination results and those children need to be down here. They take a lot of*

*responsibility for extra curricula activities*⁵¹. In R4 children with mental retardation are seen as difficult to accommodate in general education classes because *their behavior is nothing known to us and they can not learn as other children*. In these schools the special education teachers point out that they do not have knowledge enough as they are specialized in teaching children who are visually impaired.

This study show that some staff believes that there is need for segregated programs. In such instances there could develop schools with institutionalization of negative attitudes. To avoid this, schools will need support of a different kind. Among other things the new situations demand changes in the way of meeting the needs of children (Villa et al, 1992). Schools need to solve the problems of training teachers and discussing the consequences of holding negative attitudes.

Parents Attitudes

The parents in this study express their unconditional joy that their children are enrolled in the ordinary school along with non-disabled peers. They testify that their children have gained academically and socially by being in the same classes as their non-disabled peers. In U1 where two students are counted for in this study, one of the parents expresses *who would have been his friends now?* and about school performance *how would his development and school performance have looked like?* The second boy's mother feels *happy* with the situation as it is. Her son does not need to *feel bad* as he is *not* rejected or unwanted by the peers or the teacher. The parents of the boy in U4 think that the son is lucky who got the opportunity to learn with other children. He has made considerable progress. The mother who has a child in R1 is happy about her daughter being able to go to school *before she did not get any education. Now she has improved a lot at home. She helps with a lot of household work. Earlier she did nothing.* This is the same attitude held by the mother of the girl in R3 who also is a newcomer to the educational system.

From this study it is shown that parents in Sri Lanka often have major roles to play for the implementation of successful inclusive education. This is marked in the case of the prestigious national school U1. The father of the secondary education student believes that it is because of his wife's work in school during primary education the secondary functions well with friends and teachers. The mother of the primary

⁵¹ Extra curricula activities are special subjects that children can choose among.

education boy also in U1 points out that *in our culture that's a mother's duty* to support their children in school. Parents to children, who have more severe learning and movement difficulties, e.g. in R1 and R3, have to follow their children to school before they can manage themselves or arrangements with peers have to be made to accompany those who can not manage by themselves.

The views of the parents of children with disabilities regarding the benefit of inclusive education are important when considering the process leading to inclusion in schools. Therefore it is important to listen to all parties concerned, including parents. Parents should be asked about their different views with the aim of taking their different concerns into consideration, and to investigate how the process influences parents and to find their views of how children experience school.

Peers' Attitudes

The short-term trained teacher at R3 reports that they *now have skills in conflict solution* that she finds useful in working with positive approaches. A few teachers at R4 have the same training; *I learnt how to involve students in keeping peace*. This seems to give results as there is a student with obviously different behavior that causes curiosity among children but as the teachers are working on acceptance and peace keeping, conflicts and 'bullying' has so far been avoided. A Sri Lanka study by Dissanayake (1982) has a different outcome than has this one. Dissanayake means that attitudes at large are negative and that teachers and children alike ridicule those with disabilities. Miles (1985) in his Pakistan study supports the findings from this study that the majority of children without disabilities show positive attitudes and care for their peers with disabilities.

In the study there are two students enrolled in upper secondary school, years 10 - 12. Their inclusion seems to depend on these students' personalities, and not on how they perform academically or through the teachers' assistance. One issue, which is recognized as making a change for acceptance, is the consistency of groups of pupils in U1. Dushanka has followed his peers throughout school and friendship and caring developed during early school years. Supportive networks of friends' as tools for inclusion have developed. Even if there are only two children from secondary school that participate in this study it is known from elsewhere that personality characteristics makes a difference in how children accept each other. Surangani in U3 is accepted due to the fact that she is who she is. Her personality

characteristics have made a difference in the relationships with her classmates that they also express.

This study can not confirm that children without disabilities in the eight schools reject children with disabilities. There is one exemption, Chantilatta in R1. The other children with disabilities report that they have friends. This is an important finding because, if taken seriously, this can contribute to a deeper understanding about how to develop inclusive education in the classrooms and how life experiences can be shared. The teachers have probably contributed to this positive attitude by encouraging children to support each other, which frequently occurs.

Children as Resources

In most classrooms the major aspect of diversity is that there is a distinction between a knowledgeable teacher and the children in class who are incompetent and must be taught by the teacher. Nevertheless it is recognized in some of the eight schools in the study that children can be valuable resources in teaching just because they are different, have different abilities, experiences and personal qualities. This is marked in all four urban schools even if the quality differs greatly. In all urban schools children themselves take some responsibility for their peers' comfort and learning. The older of the two boys in U1, Dushanka, benefits from the peers' attention during lessons, which is also the case for Luxman in U4. Some children help children with disabilities with their homework in U2. In U3 the peers sees that they benefit from Surangani's participation as a pupil in the class. This support in learning is not seen in the rural schools where the support is more of social character.

Restructuring teaching to suit all children could be the outcome of discussions about children as resources, and is a factor pointed out by Villa et al, (1992), Villa and Thousand (1995), Putnam (1993), and Porter and Richler (1991). This has not happened to a great extent in the studied schools. Schools and individuals recognize each other's differences, and acknowledge that students can be different from each other. In one school the differences that children have are celebrated by talking about unique abilities which is the case of Surangani in U3.

Special education teachers have different abilities to support teachers adjusting their teaching and in supporting them in their attempts to create an environment where children support each other. There is probably not only one cause for this difference. This study though

suggests that a contributory cause for this can be teacher's background qualifications.

DISCUSSION

This case study is qualitative in approach, and has its base in hermeneutic research tradition. It provides a rich well-grounded description of the experience of inclusive education practice in a specific context - eight schools in Sri Lanka. Research such as this often raises more questions than answers, which has also been the case here. My hope, however, this study contributes to the understanding of how inclusive education has developed in some schools and illuminates issues related to restructuring of these schools to enroll more and more children with special educational needs and with disabilities. Although the study's results can not be generalized to other schools and situations, it does give a wealth of knowledge about inclusive education. Whether or not this limits the value of the study depends on the reader's perspective. The findings can inspire to discussions on how to develop inclusive education in developing countries, and to compare and contrast other situations and thus help create an understanding of issues concerned with inclusion in education.

The overall aim has been to try to grasp different aspects of inclusive education on different levels, which implies, for example, that there are descriptions that give pictures of the specific culture that each school brings with it. The hermeneutic inspired approach has given an understanding that there are differences in the meaning of inclusive education between the schools.

Views and ideals

With this report I have attempted to fuse on discussions about the ideals behind inclusive education and illuminate different views through eight Sri Lanka schools. The decision, which has been taken in Sri Lanka to implement inclusive education, has implications on different levels. The state level with its policy building, the provincial and district levels where initiative is taken, and at the local level where the actual building is done are all-important factors for successful inclu-

sion. Yet it is at classroom levels that the most influential changes takes place. This study shows that teachers' and principals' concerns about implementation of changes should be taken into consideration if success is to be achieved. It also shows that most teachers and principals are willing to support inclusion. The obstacles for supporting changes are lack of skills training, lack of time for planning, and lack of necessary resources, as well as lack of commitment. This is an indication that not all eight schools are ready to make decisions for restructuring for effective teaching of all children in inclusive classrooms even if children with disabilities in this study are accepted and happy about their school situation.

It is easy for an outsider with a different outlook to highlight the need for and to criticize the absence of physical adaptation of school buildings and classrooms to facilitate inclusive education. Anyhow even in a country like Sweden, adaptation of all its schools has not been carried out in such a way that inclusive education for all Swedish children with disabilities is possible. Even if physical adaptations are of importance and make the daily struggle in a learning environment easier, in practice these adaptations seem to be of less importance than the attitudes of school staff. With changes of attitudes, teachers will be able to identify participation structures and ways to increase access to learning for all students. Principals' will see that there are possibilities to restructure the organization of classrooms. This will need strong leaders who are well informed of the legal issues of changes and how implementation could be supported - in other words leaders prepared for structural system change. Such leaders will provide collaboration among school-staff, guide staff to new understanding and help them to want to try new challenges. The leaders referred to in this study are the school-principals, the directors for special education and the supervisors. These groups of professionals will need training to become the transformational leaders that structural change needs.

There is a misunderstanding that if schools embrace inclusive education, there is no need for additional measures e.g. skills training, incentives and resources. In international conventions and guidelines such as CRC (1989) and Salamanca declaration (1994) the contrary is pointed out and the Sida Policy Document (1996) brings up the importance of using the special education trained teachers in ordinary education where they can contribute with their knowledge to teach all children. Maybe the most important factor to succeed with inclusive education is that the general classroom teachers have access to support of different kind. If schools and teachers do not get the support they need, inclusive education is likely to fail, and both teachers and

children will be blamed for this. Probably the most powerful change needed is that all teacher students during their training, learn to teach all children in the same classroom.

The knowledge about the creation of an inclusive school remains so far unfinished and the demand for change is ceaseless and will probably be so for a long time. This requires a constant challenge to discover inequalities of power in school and outside. To change the power structure to a more democratic view implies that recognition of the voices of children with and without disabilities has to take place. The degree of disabling barriers in creating the inclusive school and society has no end.

Influences from Western World

It is important to realize that exclusion in education often happens in societies where Western influences 'contribute' development of systems that are seen as unnatural to the culture (Stubbs, 1995). When considering the history of Sri Lanka where already Asoka during the 3rd century organized refuges for people with disabilities, segregation could be, by tradition, natural (Geiger, 1929). The modern Sri Lanka family ties though are strong, and even adult unmarried offspring stay in their extended families throughout life. The writing of Geiger does not indicate any special refuges for children that would carry traditions with it. Dissanayake (1982) supports the understanding that children with disability get full support and sympathy by their parents.

Emanuelsson (1995) means that values founded on views of man and democracy must be a base for the thinking when implementing inclusive education. Even if democratic values are not the same in Western countries as in Third World countries, the views of man and the local understanding of democracy contributes to inclusion. One cultural contradiction is when Western ideas induce beliefs that categorization of children is needed for educational purposes. From this study it can be seen that in many schools staff do not think there is a need to categorize children in disability groups for enrollment. Haug (1997) illuminates that when keeping in mind democratic values we should promote the contextual term inclusive integration in contrary to segregated integration programs. Such segregated integration programs are called special education units in Sri Lanka. Units for children who are visually impaired, hearing impaired or with learning problems are recent developments copying Western practices. This is a luxury

development from industrialized countries, which fails to utilize available resources and teachers, peers, and parents' skills.

Support and Empowerment

As society is gradually moving away from a traditional segregated school system towards providing all children the same opportunity in general education schools, the existing dual systems are outdated. Villa et al (1992) and Jönsson (1995) point to these systems as major barriers for developing inclusive education. In Sri Lanka, for example, special education teacher training is separated from the general teacher training, and furthermore divided into three specialties. Special education teachers are not considered competent to teach general education classes. This happens at a time when teachers all over the world are given the task of teaching diverse groups of children.

As this study's background research material and international documents suggest, school reforms must be focused for inclusive education to happen. Parallel with school reforms changes of training of teachers, both pre-service and in-service training, ought to take place. One barrier for further development of inclusion is the categorical approach to special education teacher training that lacks focus on collaborative skills and ethics. The CBR approach (Helander, 1994) stresses these needs as important in all training of professionals that will contribute to an inclusive society. In the Salamanca Statement (1994) CBR is taken up as an example of a well-tested and cost-effective way of promoting equality in access to education for students with special educational needs. López (1995) describes how CBR was the base for developing inclusive education in Vietnam.

Educational Enhancement

Maybe the most important factor to succeed with inclusive education is that teachers have access to support of different kinds. The recent development of a B. Ed. in special education that was developed in cooperation between DSE, NIE, Sri Lanka and DSE at Göteborg University, has a multi-disciplinary approach to education of children with disabilities. This development is an attempt to make special education teachers, presently trained in narrow specialties, competent to support teachers teaching the majority of children with special educational needs. The second most important change in approach is the training of teachers in short two to three weeks courses that started in 1986 (López, 1988), and has continued to develop. A more

radical change of both general teacher training, and special education teacher training would probably lead to a faster development of the creation of a school where teachers teach all children. Such change has to focus on how to handle diversity in the classroom and how to respond to children's different learning styles and needs.

A powerful tool for restructuring and preparing schools for inclusive education could be to develop collaborative teaching teams. Special education trained teacher with skills to teach a diversity of children or committed teachers trained in the short training courses by core-teams would with necessity be one of the members of such teams. The advantages with such teams are that people with different backgrounds share knowledge and skills that at its best could lead to a development of competence and thus empower the schools in their attempts to make change. Examples as in the USA (Villa & Thousand, 1995) and Vietnam (López, 1995) could be reflected upon and discussed even if directly copied models are not to be recommended.

There are no ready-made recipes for development of inclusive education as López (1995) points out from the Vietnamese experience, and such development has to be handled with care in a different culture from one's own (e.g. Csapo, 1987; Stubbs, 1995; Miles, 1995). Initially, special education training in a multi disciplinary approach to disability may be needed for the innovators of inclusive education which is done in Sri Lanka through the B. Ed in special education and the ongoing core-team training, but eventually everyone involved needs to acquire common knowledge and skills. No one directly involved in changing to inclusive approach can be excluded from training, including parents. One of the tasks, that a competent special education teacher could have, would be to plan and carry out in-service training of everyone in the school. The training in support of inclusive education never ends because new challenges are turning up as time goes by. The teachers will also need renewal of and a refinement what they already know.

This study has shown that special education teachers working in the studied schools who are trained in the education of 'blind children' are more specialized, and have greater difficulties in accepting and adjusting for children who have learning problems, than the teachers trained in teaching children with mental retardation. The short term trained teacher in R3 who have been taught by one of the existing core-teams has a creative outlook on the teaching of all children regardless of disability or learning problem. To use one's creativity and to reflect upon what is happening can be an outcome of a more

creative training where reflection about consequences of teaching takes place.

Supportive Role of Special Education Supervisors and Special Education Specialist Teachers

The special education supervisors placed in regional education offices or in resource centers have much to contribute. To succeed with inclusive education this category of staff will have to be selected among those teachers who can bring about change that promotes inclusive education into communities. These supervisors must have considerable knowledge about how to bring about change in schools, how to evaluate the process of change that takes place and to be able to promote advocacy leading to school-staff and parents changing attitudes.

The study shows that in schools where supervisors have specialist training in the teaching of visually impaired children inclusive education is more reluctantly accepted than it is in other schools. When the supervisor has the background in teaching children with mental retardation, that is the case in one of the rural schools and three urban schools, children with more severe learning problems are easier accepted. Where the special education teacher has two year training in teaching visually impaired children, the difficulties tend to be greater than they are if the special education teacher is trained for mental retardation or in short courses focusing on inclusive education. This is especially marked between rural schools where three of four special education teachers are recruited from 'teachers of the blind', and the urban schools where three special education teachers have their background in the teaching of children with mental retardation. To make a change the support training for professional education programs needs to be changed so that skills and visions other than the traditional ones are explored because those lead to status quo.

The directors for special education, who are placed in the regional education offices, are in charge of special education development could work to expand the availability of appropriate services and support within schools that allow everyone to participate and contribute in a meaningful way. This can not easily be done unless that person is prepared for the role.

Principal's Preparation as Leaders of Inclusive Schools

As the school principals in Sri Lanka are powerful in their leading role it is important that they receive the training they will need to change their schools in favor of teaching diversity groups. Among their many roles is that of being instructional leader and moral gatekeeper. My experience says that the traditional leading style preserves the 'old ways of doing things'. If principals do not get the support in the form of administrative preparation and training, the demands they have might lead them to establish separate programs carried out in units. The Vietnamese experience (López, 1995) showed that principals who had developed a clear understanding that all children can learn together are succeeding with an inclusive education approach. These principals had had the opportunity to be confronted with different in-built 'fears', discuss their value systems and compare them with belief systems in other parts of the world. As was discovered later to 1995, the skill of talking to children, asking them about their wants and needs, their understanding and knowledge contributed to a deeper understanding of all children's learning processes and thus acceptance as children in a general school. However principals will also need ongoing support and continuing possibilities for developing themselves through in-service training programs.

Support by Parents and Peers

There is a dimension of support related to this study that must be specially acknowledged and discussed. In Sri Lanka the support by peers and family-members is strong in schools wherever inclusive education is more successful than in the rest. Villa and Thousand (1995) concur on the need for teachers to share responsibility with children and parents, which is not a new idea but seldom practiced. Family-focused support is also slow in development in Sri Lanka but seen in some schools as essential for development of inclusive education. Parents are not just parents. They are 'families in a special sort of social system'. Because 'they are social systems' they can not be described by linear relationships where the same support could be expected from each of them. To build on parents' knowledge and skills about their children's education is not uncomplicated because its deeper meaning is that schools involve them in planning, implementation, and evaluation in order to empower the system

To build support on the contribution of peers has been successful in the Vietnamese experience (López, 1995) of inclusive education where 'circles of friends' were built in schools where inclusive education was started. The children involved in this study help and support each

other. This willingness could be built on for developing support networks where children could be recruited to support peers with disabilities e.g. to accompany them to and from school, to help with homework, and during lessons. It is only the imagination that stops the work that peers can do if given the possibility and the responsibility. In this way the students in schools will know about disabilities in a natural way. The less formal information may contribute to promoting relationships where children with and without disabilities talk about their feelings incidentally. This is pronounced in the case of Surangani where peers' point out *that we have learnt that people are different and still capable...* At the same time the local cultural aspects can be taken into consideration (Miles, 1995).

Support for Curriculum Development

Support for curriculum work and development must not be forgotten when concerns about the vision of inclusive education are developing. Traditionally it is believed that there are two types of children, so called 'typical' children and the special ones. In Sri Lanka the last category consists mainly of children with disabilities. It is also believed that these children have different instructional needs that are so different that they require special teaching techniques. When observing the classrooms in the eight schools and looking at the children's deskwork all children except for one, study the same curriculum as children without disabilities. In several classrooms consideration about children's different learning abilities are made. This is very much in line with the contemporary research that there are no techniques or pedagogy that can provide children with disabilities with right experiences that help them to learn. What research has proven is that good teaching is good teaching for all children. Children in special education units are not following the same curriculum as children in general education. When children study a different curriculum from their peers the message is conveyed that these children have a lower standing, as they do not learn the same things as other children do. These children will bear with them out in the society the stigma that they belong to a lower class of people. This finding lies in line with the findings from the literature studied (Tomlinson, 1982; Hill & Rabe 1987; Ainscow & Twedde, 1988).

Reflections

There is no doubt that school development in Sri Lanka as seen from this study has taken a turn towards 'A School For All Children' regardless of disability in its own silent way. Instead of looking at chil-

dren as belonging to special groups, the tendencies in the eight schools are that all students are held to differ from one another. It is also understood that 'the journey towards inclusive education where lessons from the past are learned and reflected upon' takes time as expressed by López (1995). The ongoing training of special education lecturers of Teacher Training College, the staff of special needs education at NIE, key persons such as directors of special education from different provinces as well as supervisors and principals will contribute further to the restructuring of schools for inclusive education development.

The schools in the study are different: school-staff in the different schools are differently composed, teachers think differently, and the teaching is different, but common for the eight schools is that there are few signs of children with disabilities feeling rejected. As children without disabilities show very little signs, if any, of rejecting children with disabilities it is important that school staff do not show signs of wishing to separate children who are different from the non disabled children, as such attitudes will be noticeable for children and easy to imitate. How to handle this is a delicate matter which has to be carefully attended to by principals, and supervisors or directors appointed for special education, and posted in the regional offices or in the resource centers which are being built up.

Finally I want to draw attention to the controversial issue that there is a tradition of categorizing children before school enrollment. Categorization is especially troublesome when talking about children with learning problems. The number of children judged to belong to such categories varies wildly depending on who is doing the categorization and what criteria and definitions are used. Now and again it is written in reports that statistics on children with categorized disabilities are needed in order to really know how many children with disabilities are included in ordinary schools. This in itself may contribute to segregation. There are other ways to know if all children in a village, district, etc are provided with education which would be a more positive way to approach statistics in order to promote a school where all children are welcome. In the studied schools there is starting a willingness to ask 'who the child in front of you is' and what that child's needs are instead of concentrating on the child's disability, which is a clear advantage in the development of inclusive education.

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