

Notes from the Editor

Making education systems inclusive and implementing inclusive approaches with equity and quality for all children have become a paramount concern as access to basic education services expand and come close to becoming universal.

The overall rationale of inclusive education is to recognise the reality of varying capabilities and circumstances of learners and to design pedagogy and institutional management to respond to the variations among individuals and groups. A sub-set of this question is responding to the largely neglected needs of children with various forms of “disabilities” who constitute up to 10 percent of the child population. Very often in policy discourse and programme designs, inclusion tends to be equated with including children with ‘varying abilities’ in the mainstream of general education. Is this an unmixed blessing, irrespective of the degree of variation in abilities? If not, what are the implications for policy and programme? These issues are signaled, not necessarily answered fully, in this issue.

A broader view of inclusion is based on the recognition of innate differences among children and differences arising from the socio-economic circumstances which need to be taken into account both in formal basic general education and in expanding non-formal life-long learning opportunities.

The four articles in this issue deal with the narrower dimension of inclusion of children with special needs as well as the broader vision of inclusion with life-long learning through community learning centres.

M. Tariq Ahsan, Umesh Sharma and Joanne M. Deppeler investigate beliefs about inclusive education of heads of higher education institutions that offer pre-service teacher preparation programs in Bangladesh. The writers argue and show how the beliefs and attitudes of heads of the institutions that are offering pre-service teacher education in Bangladesh are key influences in the preparation of future teachers for inclusive education.

Somewhat in the same vein, Muhammed Mahbubur Rahman explores teachers’ understanding of their own teaching strategies that support inclusive educational practices for children with disabilities at secondary schools in Bangladesh. This is in part dependent on beliefs and values teachers bring to the classroom and their perception of the impact of the contextual environment on human behaviour.

Two case studies from China and Nepal are presented on the community learning centre model of life-long learning that extends learning opportunities for members of the community responding to their diverse needs and circumstances. Sultana Kaniz Fatima writes about the role of the Bungamati community learning centre on the outskirts of Kathmandu in preserving traditional woodcarving skills as a means of supplementing family earning and asserting social and cultural identity of the people. Wen Zhan writes about the community learning centre in Yuannan in China, again as a vehicle for serving multiple learning and cultural needs of the ethnic communities in the province and promoting the development of their human and social capital.