

Resource Rooms in Mainstream Schools

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Abstract: Worldwide, there has been a conscious shift from special schools to inclusive education. In this light, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has sent an advisory to all schools titled 'Inclusive Practices in CBSE schools' (Circular 45, dated 29th October 2008). Some of the guidelines in this document include, 'to ensure that no child with special needs is denied admission in Mainstream Education'; 'to revisit classroom organization required for the education of Children with Special Needs'; 'to ensure regular in-service training of teachers in inclusive education at the elementary and secondary level'. Following these guidelines is a challenge for any mainstream school. Apart from creating admission policies and hiring qualified people, the question of how to provide amenities to special children, arises. This paper addresses the question of 'how'. The paper explores and sheds light on the need for resource rooms; resources required in a resource room- both human and physical; processes in a functioning resource room- Individualized plans, collaboration, documentation et al. The theoretical paper intends to simplify the global issue of resource rooms to school principals, school management, school psychologists, teachers, parents and advocators of meaningful education.

I. Introduction

The resource room is a classroom where a special education programme can be delivered to a student with a disability and learning difficulty. It is for those students who belong to a regular class but need some special instructions in an individualised or small group setting for a portion of the day. It is typically a large room in the main school building with lots of facilities for children with special needs. This program includes remedial, compensatory and developmental instruction, which is provided in small groups for usually three to five hours per week.

Students may be provided direct services in the classroom. Indirect services can also be provided to the student through consultation with the general education teachers to support in adjusting the learning environment or modify the instructional methods. When additional support is appropriate to meet the student's needs, the student can receive the pull-out Resource Room program. This form of a "pull out" system, where a child attends a session in the resource room during a light period of the day such as singing or physical training, receives individual help in a weak area of learning such as reading or writing. Methods and materials are adapted to students' learning styles and characteristics using multisensory and other specialized approaches.

II. Need for resource rooms in India

World over, the education community is using inclusion practices for children with special needs. Inclusion in education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. In the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) reiterate the idea of inclusion. These are mandate for all schools to follow. In the US, the IDEA requires public schools to develop an IEP for every student with a disability who is found to meet the federal and state requirements for special education. For this purpose, the community came together to form resource rooms in mainstream schools.

In India, there has been a steady progress on the government's part to help the disabled. The Persons With Disabilities (PWD) Act promotes the integration of students with disabilities in normal schools. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act relates to standardization of training courses for rehabilitation professionals and supports the accreditation of training institutions and of individuals desirous of becoming rehabilitation professionals. The disabilities recognized are visually handicapped, hearing handicapped, those suffering from locomotor disability and

those suffering from mental retardation. More recently the government is planning to revise the PWD act. The new legislation plans to guarantee equality and non-discrimination to all persons with disabilities. The central government is also contemplating formation of a 'disability rights authority'. There is always hope for some of the other silent/non visible disabilities to be included in the act.

There has been an increase in awareness about the invisible disabilities, atleast in the major cities. More and more schools are taking initiative in the area of educating children with disabilities. Lately, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has sent an advisory to all schools titled 'Inclusive Practices in CBSE schools' (Circular 45, dated 29th October 2008). Some of the guidelines in this document include 'to ensure that no child with special needs is denied admission in Mainstream Education'; 'to revisit classroom organization required for the education of Children with Special Needs'; 'to ensure regular in-service training of teachers in inclusive education at the elementary and secondary level'.

Schools that question the need for a resource room must understand that there is a need and it is important and wise to recognize it and meet the need before it goes out of hand. Excluding children with disability is not the solution. A more humane approach would be to teach them in different ways so that they learn. Schools with resource rooms should be lauded for taking this step.

III. Types of Resource rooms

There are many kinds of resource rooms depending on the disabilities present in the school, resources available, logistics etc. Resource rooms may vary slightly depending on the grades it is catering to.

Some of the popular resource rooms are categorical resource rooms which serve only students who have one particular disability. Some resource rooms are Cross-Categorical Resource Rooms. In this type, several students with several disabilities functioning at about the same gross achievement levels, attend the resource room. Students who are learning disabled, educable, mentally retarded, and behaviorally disordered are often placed together in this type of resource room. This is the most common type of resource room. Non-categorical Resource Rooms are for all children with disabilities in states that do not recognize categorical distinctions. In Specific-Skills Resource Rooms the aim is curricular content at one basic skill area (usually reading or math). There are also itinerant Resource Programs where students visit the re-source room on a daily basis but without a schedule. This is popular in rural areas with very small schools in difficult-to-reach locations may provide one resource teacher for several schools, which he or she visits every other day.

It is said that the minimum time spent must be 3 hours a week. The duration each child spends in the resource room varies depending on the type of room, the organization of timetables and the extent of disability. There can a variety of time styles and groups depending on the number of children. The groups can meet in a variety of time styles such as four times a week for 45 minutes at the elementary level meeting the minimum time requirement by regulation. This model provides the teacher with one day or a period of time each day for consultation and evaluation. At the secondary level, students are usually scheduled for 5 periods a week in Resource rooms. Resource rooms seem grade pure at the middle school level. This allows the teacher to focus on deficit skill development within the framework of curricular needs at each grade level.

IV. The Resource Room team

The core team would consist of a special education teacher and many teacher aides. The extended team would include the school management, counselor, psychologist, parents and the community.

Special Educator role- Special Education teacher should be the instructional leader of the resource room. They should be the most dynamic and the most innovative. She/he contributes important information and experience about how to educate children with disabilities. Because of his or her training in special education, this teacher can talk about such issues as how to modify the general curriculum to help the child learn; the supplementary aids and services that the child may need to be successful in the regular classroom and elsewhere; how to modify testing so that the student can show what he or she has learned; and other aspects of individualizing instruction to meet the student's unique needs.

Beyond helping to write the IEP, the special educator has responsibility for working with the student to carry out the IEP. He or she may create schedules and time tables work with the student in a resource room or special class devoted to students receiving special education services; collaborate with regular education teacher; and work with other school staff, particularly the regular education teacher, to provide expertise about addressing the child's unique needs. He/ She provides professional development and training to teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others who provide services for children with disabilities.

Role of teachers: The regular education teacher has a great deal to share with the team. For example, he or she might talk about the general curriculum in the regular classroom; the aids, services or changes to the educational program that would help the child learn and achieve; and strategies to help the child with behavior, if behavior is an issue.

The regular education teacher may also discuss with the IEP team the supports for school staff that are needed so that the child can advance toward his or her annual goals, be involved and progress in the general curriculum; participate in extracurricular and other activities; and be educated with other children, both with and without disabilities.

Role of parents: Parents are considered to be full and equal members of the resource room especially during the making of the IEP. Parents are crucial members of the team because they have unique knowledge of their child's strengths and needs. In order to fully participate in developing their child's IEP, parents must be knowledgeable about their child's specific disabilities and their rights. Parents have the right to be involved in meetings that discuss the identification, evaluation, IEP development and educational placement of their children. They also have the right to ask questions, dispute points, and request modifications to the plan.

Role of the school management: All schools are obligated to make a proposal of services to the parent. The school must make a significant effort to ensure that one or both of the parents are present at each IEP team meeting. If parents are unable to attend, the school must be able to show that due diligence was made to enable the parents to attend, including notifying the parents early enough that they have an opportunity to attend, scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed on time and place, and offering alternative means of participation, such as a phone conference. The school must also take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of IEP team meetings, including arranging for an interpreter for parents who are deaf or whose native language is not English.

Role of a Psychologist: A psychologist is a professional with a post graduate degree in Psychology. He/she is knowledgeable about a number of disorders. A psychologist must be a part of the resource room team and can contribute in assessing new admissions for any form of special needs; help in appropriate placement of the child; provide referrals to the parents; give a patient listening to the distressed parents; provide training to the school staff. He/ she is an expert on behaviour and can provide assistance to children with behaviour problems. Most importantly he/she participates in IEP meetings to follow up with each child.

Role of a School Counselor: A school counselor on board will be an added advantage to the resource room team. He/ She will be responsible for the holistic development of the child. He/ She helps all students develop skills in the areas of personal/social growth, educational planning, and career and vocational development. The school counselor establishes the school counseling program and develops activities and resources to implement and evaluate the program. The school counselor provides individual and group counseling services to meet the developmental, preventive, and remedial needs of students. Some of the popular techniques such as play therapy; art therapy etc will help children who come to the resource room. This person will a part of the meetings along with students, parents, teachers, and other school and community personnel to assist in meeting the needs of students. The counselor also assists the special education teacher with the educational placement of students by using appropriate educational assessment strategies.

Role of a Life-skill trainers: The concept of life skill education is gaining momentum and rightfully so. It is an important way to perpetuate psycho-social competence among young students. The main objective of life skill education is to enable students develop a concept of oneself as a worthy and contributing member of the society. Besides acquiring knowledge, students should have social skills, emotional balance, time management skills, financial literacy, health consciousness, and problem-solving skills among others. Life skill trainers focus on developing skills such as decision making, empathy, and interpersonal relationships.

Role of an Educational consultant: A consultant is someone with a lot of experience in the field of education and special education. He/She should have received Master's level of professional training in special education or other education area.

They serve as an advocate for all children and youth. They need to be available upon request to local and area administrators in regard to support for instructional personnel. They participate in the recruitment process for staff as requested by management and assist in the development of professional development activities for local and area staff. They are responsible for periodic and specifically requested program reports and assist in the development and maintenance of annual reports as required.

V. Services provided in a Resource room

The resource room may usually get a referral when a teacher observes the child having difficulty in the classroom. Sometimes, parents have already assessed the child, in which case the referral is from outside. Sometimes the pediatrics doctor of the concerned child may notify the school counselor or psychologist.

The following are the usual services provided in a resource room.

1. **Assessment and Evaluation:** The resource room team's first step is to gather specific data regarding the student's progress or academic problems. This may be done through a conference with parents, observation of the student, analysis of the student's performance (attention, behavior, work completion, tests, classwork, homework, etc.). A conference with the student is done if the child is older. More detailed assessments may be done the child as per the requirement.
2. **Placement Services:** The information collected helps school personnel determine the next step. The next step would be to check the extent of disability and the services to be provided to the child. Depending on the needs of the child, his or her IEP may be carried out in the regular class (with supplementary aids and services, as needed), in a special class (where every student in the class is receiving special education services for some or all of the day), or in the resource room. Placement can also be done by contracting with another agency to provide an appropriate program.
3. **Individualized plans:** After the team collates their observations; they usually plan an IEP meeting. The IEP refers to Individualized Education Plan. It guides the resource teacher in planning lessons and providing appropriate instruction for the child. In some countries the IEP is a legal document outlining special education services for a student with a disability who requires specially designed instruction. It spells out what your child's special education services will look like on a day-to-day basis. It is essentially a roadmap guiding the team to provide your child with the help that he or she needs in order to be successful in school.

Content of the IEP: Present Levels: The IEP contains a statement of present levels of performance including strengths. Information about the child's strengths and needs is presented by teachers, parents, and the school staff who evaluated him/her. Comments will be made about how the child is doing in the classroom. Observations and results of state and district-wide tests and the special education evaluation, including individually administered standardized tests, are reviewed. Besides academic needs, any other areas of concern that have been identified, such as language development, behavior, or social skills, will be discussed as well.

Measurable annual goals: The next step is to write measurable goals that the child can reasonably accomplish in one year. Goals are based on what was discussed and documented in present levels of educational performance and focus on his needs that result from the disability. Goals should help him be involved and progress in the general curriculum and may be academic, social, behavioral, self-help, or address other educational needs.

A statement of the services that will be provided: The services that the child needs to reach the goals and objectives and how they'll be delivered are identified. Examples of services can be specially designed instruction, program modifications, and classroom accommodations, specific number of hours in the resource room and supplementary aids and services.

Apart from the above, a description of how progress will be measured, description of how parents will be informed about their child's progress, an explanation of the extent that the child will be educated away from typical peers is

mentioned in the IEP. A statement of accommodations necessary during state or district assessments, the projected beginning date as well as the frequency, location, and duration of services is also included in the plan. A transition plan (This is only required for a child who will be turning 16 during the duration of the annual IEP. It is not needed for younger students) can also be included.

The IEP should also be reviewed and revised if the child is not making progress toward the annual IEP goals or when there is new information found about the child or when the child needs change. The IEP is a working and fluid document. It can easily be revised so that it contains the most current and useful information.

4. Remediation: This is one of the main functions in the resource rooms. Individual needs are remediated in areas of visual and auditory processing deficits, languages, reading, math, handwriting, written expression, spelling, vocabulary and organizational skills. Different approaches are available to remediate each of these areas and can be chosen on what suits the child best. Materials are available and can be easily made.
5. Consultation: If it is found that the child needs intervention from a party outside the school premises, then one of the team members can be in a position to provide a consult. For example, if the child needs an occupational therapy assessment, the psychologist will refer the concerned parents to a specialist in the community.

VI. Resources required in a resource room

Apart from the human resource mentioned earlier, the following are the essential requirements for a resource room.

Logistics: Costing and spacing are major resources required to have a functioning resource room. Contrary to common perception, it is relatively economical to set up a resource room in a school. While the school has to bear the cost of paying the team's salary, the remaining expenses involve a one-time investment. The room identified as a resource room should be well-lit with good ventilation. The room should have some storage space for teaching aids.

Physical Setup of the Resource Room

The setup of the room can be left to anybody's imagination. The set up depends on the budget of the school. A school can use high end material or simple everyday reusable materials to have their rooms running. An example could be a large space with numerous centers. A 'computer center' with tons of educational computer games and a list of approved websites, a 'reading area' with tons of books from all levels, an area with games, blocks, a "kitchen" and "tool shop" (both those plastic play centers), a 'writing center' to improve writing skills, a 'math corner' for math related remediation. A 'read alouds' and teaching area can also be added.

It is important that the decor is attractive without being distracting. Furniture must be multipurpose and child-friendly. Cheap and effective storage containers include wooden fruit boxes, large cardboard boxes from grocery stores, and laundry baskets. Shelves used for storing small props and materials or for holding boxes and baskets can be used. Bulky items can be stored in large containers on the floor beneath the bottom shelf. Labels should be attached to such boxes or baskets, describing their contents.

Items for the Resource Room

Specialized teaching aids are an integral aspect of remedial education. The special education teacher can make her own teaching aids and also use readymade ones. Basic items to be included in a resource room would be curriculum related books for all grades and levels, stationery and teaching aides/ educational manipulatives.

Recyclable items can provide many of the props and materials to be used in the classroom. Items discarded by stores and businesses can sometimes be used. Parents might bring in other materials, such as yarn, buttons, plastic containers, paper-towel rolls, shells, pinecones, rocks, and feathers. Favorite items of children are boxes, which become many things in children's symbolic transformations. Often, items that children use at home can find their way into the classroom resource room. Books, toys, crayons, puzzles etc. are add-ons for children to use during breaks.

Processes in a functioning resource room

The following attributes will help a resource room function to its capability.

Collaboration and Organization: The school management, teachers and parents work together to help the child. All the three parties work in an organized manner, meet regularly, document everyday observations. They collaborate with other agencies in the community like a speech therapist for example.

Documentation: The IEP is an important documentation. Other than this, daily/ weekly observations can be documented to monitor the child.

Team Spirit: The resource room team's objective is to benefit children. This means that a great camaraderie must exist among all the team members. There must be no room for politics or gossip.

VII. Conclusion

Helen Henderson, a famous Columnist says "Schools that include everyone promote harmony along with an appreciation for the differences that mark us individually and culturally. Segregation fosters unfamiliarity, distrust and disrespect, breeding grounds for harassment and bullying – among kids and countries."

Inclusive education and resource rooms are a boon to children with disabilities. Nevertheless, the 'mainstream' and 'normal' children would also benefit from having children with special needs around. They all would grow into empathetic, supportive, and caring individuals which are much needed in the society today.

VIII. REFERENCES

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