



Inclusion in Practice: Studying the Processes of Socialisation and Identity Formation Among Disabled and Non-Disabled Students in an Inclusive School

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Abstract:

The goal of inclusive schooling, which is founded on the rights-based approach to education, is to incorporate students with disabilities into regular classroom settings. This study delves into the processes of inclusion, collaboration, and identity building among students in an inclusive school environment. The study was carried out in an inclusive school in New Delhi using ethnographic methodology, and employed research tools like focused group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and observations with students in Classes 5 to 8.

The findings reveal that inclusive education fosters interaction, cooperation, and peer learning among disabled and non-disabled students. Certain practices followed in the school, such as buddy systems, shared activities, and acquisition of communication skills (e.g., sign language) enable collaboration amongst the students. However, these interactions often remain situational (and functional) rather than deeply relational. The study also highlights persistent social divisions, for example, students tend to form groups based on disability. This reinforced an “us versus them” dynamic.

Stigmatisation and notions of ‘normal’ significantly shape students’ identities. Disabled students often internalize societal perceptions of inferiority, leading to hesitation, lower self-esteem, and limited aspirations. Simultaneously, non-disabled students may develop subtle attitudes of superiority.

The research concludes that while inclusive education promotes interaction and diversity, it does not automatically eliminate social hierarchies. Effective inclusion requires addressing deeper societal attitudes alongside institutional practices.

Keywords:

Inclusive Education, Peer Learning, School Socialization, Disability, Identity Formation, Social Interaction.