THE ROLE OF ICT IN CONSTRUCTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

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Abstract

Citizens of a country play a major role in transforming a society into an educated one. With the help of ICT the educated citizens of the country can lead the society towards the development. Today, the view of special education is giving way to a broader, more philosophical approach, an approach designed to weave inclusive practices into the fabric of the whole new environment for the betterment of the society. This paper discusses the role played by ICT in building a inclusive society.

Key Words: *Inclusive Society, Information and Communication Technology, Integration.*

Introduction

'The nation which embraces technology most willingly and effectively will be the winners in tomorrow's world.'

Hunt

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a force that has changed many aspects of the way we live. If one was to compare such fields as medicine, tourism, travel business, law, banking, engineering and architecture, the impact of ICT across the past two or three decades has been enormous. The way these fields operate today is vastly different from the ways they operated in the past. ICT's has the capacity to provide support for customized educational programs and to meet the needs of individual learners. Information and communication technology (ICT) refers to a technology employed in form of tools, equipment and application support which helps in the collections storage, retrieval, use, transmission, manipulation and dissemination of information as accurately and efficiently as possible for the purpose of enriching the knowledge and develop communication, decision making as well as problem solving ability of the user. ICTs provide students with self paced, self directed, problem based or constructivist learning experiences, as well as it helps teachers in evaluating student learning experience in new, interactive and attractive ways that may better assess the depth of their understanding of content and processes. Today, ICTs are used in teaching learning process, distance and on-line education, establishing virtual classrooms, thus, harnessing its power as an effective tool and media of formal, informal and non-formal education.

Information Literacy

Another way in which emerging ICTs are impacting on the content of education curricula stems from the ways in which ICTs are dominating so much of contemporary life and work. The drives to promote such development from general moves among institutions to ensure their graduates demonstrate not only skills and knowledge in their subject domains but also general attributes and generic skills. Traditionally generic skills have involved such capabilities as ability to reason formally, to solve problems, to communicate effectively, to be able to negotiate outcomes, to manage time, project management, and collaboration and teamwork skills. The growing use of ICTs as tools of everyday life have seen the pool of generic skills expanded in recent years to include information literacy and it is highly probable that future developments and technology applications will see this set of skills growing even more. An information society is a society where the creation, distribution, uses, integration and manipulation of information is a significant economic, political, and cultural activity. Its main driver are digital information and communication technologies, which have resulted in an information explosion and are profoundly changing all aspects of social organization, including the economy, education, health, warfare, government and democracy. The

People who have the means to partake in this form of society are sometimes called digital citizens. This is one of many dozen labels that have been identified to suggest that humans are entering a new phase of society.

Inclusion: New Approach

Today, the view of special education is giving way to a broader, more philosophical approach - an approach designed to weave inclusive practices into the fabric of the whole-school environment. Much of that evolution has been driven by the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), which was explicitly designed to merge special education with whole-school reform. Among other things, the amendments mandate that all students have access to the general curriculum and that schools be accountable for the educational outcomes of every student.

On a macro level, the merging of this new approach to special education with whole-school reform makes good sense. The philosophy of inclusive practices is perfectly compatible with current models of whole-school reform. Both sets of ideas embrace staff collaboration, shared decision making, a focus on student outcomes, and community outreach as central tenets.

On a micro level, however, the challenge can seem overwhelming to schools. Changing a school's environment is a huge undertaking; remaking special education in the process can seem to some administrators like one task too many.

The basic premise of universal design for learning is that a curriculum should include alternatives to make it accessible and applicable to students, teachers, and parents with different backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, and disabilities in widely varied learning contexts. The "universal" in universal design does not imply one optimal solution for everyone, but rather it underscores the need for inherently flexible, customizable content, assignments, and activities.

Inclusion: Approach & Philosophy

Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that provides all students with community membership and greater opportunities for academic and social achievement. Inclusion is about making sure that each and every student feels welcome and that their unique needs and learning styles are attended to and valued. Research shows that most students learn and perform better when exposed to the richness of the general education curriculum, as long as the appropriate strategies and accommodations are in place. Today it is widely accepted that inclusion maximizes the potential of the vast majority of students, ensures their rights, and is the preferred educational approach for the 21st century. Unfortunately, the philosophy has not always been widely held. Our thinking and acceptance has evolved rapidly over the last century, and continues to evolve, in response to federal and state law, along with our changing social and political beliefs. As we strive to meet these challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools.

It is generally agreed that schools need a strong philosophy of inclusion which supports the right of all children to participate in an inclusive way (Special Education Review Committee, 2000; Lupart, 2002; Bunch, 1999). Raymond (1995) quotes Klaus Puhlman of the Yellowknife School District, who presents the following tenets of a positive inclusive philosophy:

➢ Every student has the right to participate in all aspects of school life;
➢ Every student will participate in a regular homeroom with supports to individual needs provided through that classroom – modification of regular curriculum will take place outside the regular classroom only if specific skills cannot be accommodated within a regular setting;
➢ All students will be placed in an age-appropriate setting, within the student's attendance area.

The Saskatchewan Special Education Unit (2001) also provides a number of indicators of inclusive educational philosophy. These include:

➢ Individualization and child-centered programming;
➢ Sharing of educational responsibility with the student's family;
➢ Learning with "age-appropriate" peers who do not have disabilities;
➢ Educational goals "that is functional for the life and life direction of the particular student involved".
➢ The use of teaching methods that is natural and least intrusive;
➢ Provision of instruction in multiple environments – classroom, other school environments, the home, the community;
➢ Integration of needed supports/services and types of instruction.

Conclusion

Inclusion is about making sure that each and every student feels welcome and that their unique needs and learning styles are attended to and valued. It is now impossible to live without ICTs, and it is precisely information and

communication that gives us access to the culture and knowledge that enables us to develop human potential and ensure a life of dignity for disabled people and their families. Accessibility requires changes to ways of thinking and acting in society. As human beings, we are prone to a duality that roots us in the past but also drives us to transform ourselves and our environment. Accessibility is a culture, a way of life that aims to create a present of greater dignity and a harmonious future for all, without exceptions, without exclusion. A society can be transformed into a enlightened one only when each strata of people are considered and valued.

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