THOUGHTS ON PLANNING FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ACROSS INDIA

Individual School Level Support Infrastructure

Individual schools must develop an internal infrastructure which permits them to deal with supporting included students directly. For those schools cooperating with NRCI/SSI, this means that reliance for students already included must shift from NRCI/SSI to school staff. For schools which will include students in the future, an internal structure must be in place when the first included students arrive. Reliance by present cooperating inclusive schools and future inclusive schools will swamp NRCI/SSI resources.

At least three infrastructure aspects are fundamental:

- A staff member (Inclusion Facilitator) should be assigned to support other teachers in including students. This support may take a variety of forms; team teaching, advising on inclusive strategies, arranging meetings, maintaining records, collaborating on preparation of Individual Education Plans, monitoring progress. It may be of value to consider assignment of this role to the teacher provided by the government under the 1 teacher to 8 students with disabilities plan already in place. This Inclusion Facilitator will require a degree of preparation for her/his role.

- An In-school Inclusion Team to coordinate the inclusion program, consider the whole school approach to inclusion, plan for the future, and trouble-shoot concerns as they arise should be in place. This team will include the in-school Inclusion Facilitator, teachers from various standards, a school administrator, colleagues from other disciplines, etc. This Team will play a major role in

assisting the Inclusion Facilitator in strengthening the inclusion program for the whole school and for individual students.

- Careful record keeping around program aspects such as curriculum performance levels, student needs, student skills, and support strategies tried and their results must be maintained. Record keeping should be as simple as possible, yet informative in sketching a picture of each educational program. Care must be taken not to allow record keeping to expand to the point where service to students is lost.

School System Support Infrastructure

Just as individual schools have support infrastructures, the school system to which individual schools belong must develop its own support infrastructure. Two major aspects of this infrastructure are a core System Resource Team and leadership of the whole inclusion program.

- The System Resource Team consists of individual teachers well versed in at least one category of disability, and hopefully more (. E.g. hearing impairment, intellectual challenge, and physical challenge). Members of this Team will respond to calls for assistance from school Inclusion Facilitators when the knowledge of the Facilitator and the In-school Inclusion Team does not match what is needed for program planning. This Team will respond to calls for assistance, plan and provide in-service professional preparation for Inclusion Facilitators and other staff, develop teaching aids, and undertake system-wide planning.

- Strong leadership of the system inclusion program is an absolute necessity. The program must be supported from the senior leadership, through school administrators, and to the level of Inclusion Facilitators. No doubt should be left that the program is of value and that all are expected to support the program. This calls for careful planning of school and system support infrastructure, review of infrastructures, and involvement of parents, people with disabilities, and other disciplines in collaborative fashion.

NRCI Infrastructure

It is obvious that NRCI should assume a leadership role in assisting school systems to develop in-school structures and system structures. In addition, NRCI can play a major role in development of local area resource capacity and leadership. The existing framework of SSI associations (Delhi, Chennai, etc.) may serve as the initial areas in which local resource capacity and leadership may be developed. This does not mean that reliance should be placed on this framework of SSI associations, but that advantage might be taken of areas already showing some sensitivity to the needs of those with disabilities. Local NRCI resource staff would not work from the physical facilities of SSI associations, but from a community base (NRCI Outreach-Delhi, NRCI Outreach-Kolkatta, etc.).

Local NRCI outreach operations would function in the areas of assistance to school systems, information provision to allied disciplines, development of professional preparation opportunities, development of new support strategies, development of support materials, advocacy for inclusion, leadership development in organizations of

persons with disabilities, etc. The overall objective would be to work with school systems to establish infrastructure capacity.

A pilot of this outreach capacity could be focused on the Bandra school. To emphasize the regular school system focus of the outreach program, the outreach operation should be physically separated from the SSI facilities in the city. It should be sited in the community and designed as an educational community resource. The image of the service as independent of special school services and belief systems is important.

Research Infrastructure

NRCI has taken pains to establish research capacity around inclusive education. An action research direction with a qualitative focus has been taken.

This research capacity should be nurtured as inclusion spreads in India. Individual teachers should have opportunity to conduct mini research studies within their own teaching settings. Schools should have opportunity to conduct mini studies of single aspects or school wide aspects of practice. School systems should have similar opportunities.

Thought should be put into development of cadres of practitioner researchers across India. These cadres may well be comprised of staff members in NRCI Outreach groups. Advantage should be taken of the present proven but still incipient research capacity of NRCI at the same time as other aspects of an inclusive education support infrastructure are being established.

Practice and research into practice should go hand in hand.

Teacher Preparation Infrastructure

Efforts should be made to reach out to those responsible for teacher preparation, both preservice and in-service. Development of inclusion across India will challenge teacher preparation in many ways. Inclusion brings with it need to reconsider who is a student, what student rights are in the educational sense, how to regard the curriculum in an inclusive school, how to structure accommodations and adaptations, how to prepare and work with peers and parents, and many other aspects of change.

Liaisons with teacher preparation institutions and professional teacher organizations should be established. Inclusion will depend in large part on teachers feeling prepared for a new challenge.