Curriculum Adaptation At Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School: An Analysis

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Abstract: Looking into the educational practices in our State, the "factory model of education" still prevails in many institutions, echoing the legacy of the Industrial Revolution. This outdated model includes rigid practices like age-based cohorts, whole-class instruction, and standardised approaches. However, Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School stands apart by embracing the "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL), which inspires to make education flexible and accessible to diverse learners' needs. Hence, this paper aims to explore how UDL has transformed the school's curriculum, particularly for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), and offers insights for implementing similar practices in other schools.

Keywords: Curriculum Adaptations, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Children with Special Needs (CWSNs)

Introduction: Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) is a national educational goal, underscored by legislative acts like the Right to Education Act of 2009. This Act was further reinforced by the Constitutional (86th Amendment) Act, which enshrines education as a fundamental right for all children between 6-14 years. The Act also advocates integrating Children with Special Needs (CWSN) into mainstream classrooms. Hence, Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School embodies this vision by evolving from a specialised institution for visually impaired students into an inclusive school where all children learn together regardless of their abilities. However, to meet all ends, the school has adopted the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by adapting the curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of children in an inclusive environment.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Universal Design, originally rooted in architectural principles, aims to create environments and products accessible to everyone, regardless of their physical abilities or limitations, without retrofitting accommodations. This approach recognises that human diversity is the norm, and it seeks to eliminate barriers and make spaces and products usable by the widest range of people possible.
In education, a parallel concept known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has emerged as a groundbreaking framework. UDL was pioneered by Anne Meyer, David Rose, and their colleagues in the 1990s, and it represents a significant shift in how we approach teaching and learning. UDL is based on the fundamental idea that education should be flexible and inclusive, catering to all learners' diverse needs and abilities. The application of UDL principles in education is transformative. It is a departure from traditional one-size-fits-all instructional approaches. Instead, UDL recognises that every student is unique and capable of navigating their own individual learning journey. In essence, UDL treats each child as an "expert learner" who has the innate ability to determine how they learn best.

The process of UDL promotes flexibility in various aspects of education, which include:

a. **Representation:** It allows for multiple means of presenting information to students. This might involve using text, visuals, videos, or other media to convey concepts. By providing diverse representations, UDL ensures that students with different learning styles or preferences can access the content.

b. **Expression:** UDL also offers multiple means of allowing students to express what they know. Some students may excel in written assignments, while others may prefer to demonstrate their knowledge through oral presentations, art, or hands-on projects. UDL accommodates these diverse forms of expression.

c. **Engagement:** Engagement is a critical aspect of learning. UDL recognises that students have varying interests, motivations, and levels of engagement. It provides multiple pathways for students to engage in learning, whether through collaborative activities, real-world applications, or personalised goals.

By applying UDL in education, teachers create a truly inclusive learning environment. Students with disabilities, as well as those without, benefit from this approach. It not only accommodates differences but also fosters a sense of empowerment among learners. Moreover, it helps prepare students for a world where adaptability, critical thinking, and self-directed learning are essential skills.

Thus, Universal Design for Learning represents a significant shift towards student-centred education, where the focus is on the learner's needs and strengths rather than forcing students to conform to a rigid educational mould. It aligns with the core principle that education should be accessible, equitable, and tailored to the unique capabilities of each student.

**Review of Related Literature**

The literature reviewed in this study is intended to provide an overview of the application of Universal Design for Learning through adapting the curriculum, keeping in view the diverse needs of its learners.

To begin with, curriculum adaptation includes a technical analysis of curriculum content, processes and outcomes by the teacher and the adjustments they make to their instructional practices in order to meet the specific learning needs of children with disabilities in their classroom (Opertti & Brady, 2011, Williams et al., 2011). Curriculum adaptation is essential as it reduces the chances of stigma that disabled students can feel when teachers do not take into account the special learning needs of disabled students (Florian, 2008).
On reviewing the related literature concerning Universal Design for Learning (UDL), we observe the concept of UDL was an innovative movement co-founded by Anne Meyer, David Rose, and their colleagues (1990s) whose mission is to improve education for all learners through innovative uses of modern multimedia technology and contemporary research in the cognitive neurosciences. According to CAST, UDL principles are based on the most accepted finding in education research: "Students are highly variable in their response to instruction" (CAST, 2008, p.8). Hence, the Universal Design for Learning Framework (Meyer & Rose, 2000; Rose & Meyer, 2002) holds promise for proactively planning curriculum and instruction that actively engages all students collectively. UDL puts the burden of change where it belongs: on the curriculum itself (Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008).

Universal Design in Education (UDE), as defined by Bowe, involves "the preparation of curricula, materials, and environments so that they may be used, appropriately and with ease, by a wide variety of people" (2000, p. 45). Universal Design holds that everyday items are designed to be useful to a variety of users, including curb cuts, automatic doors, and building ramps (Bernacchio & Mullen, 2007; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2013; Pisha & Coyne, 2001). Other examples include word processing software, closed captioning on video displays, and symbols representing washrooms and other common facilities that provide access to the widest range of users possible. Adopted by education, Universal Design for Learning is a "blueprint for creating flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone (CAST, 1998, paragraph 2). As Meyer & Rose (2000) contend, educators who design their learning methods for the "divergent needs of 45 'special' populations increase usability for everyone" (p. 39). In addition to increased access and usability, embedding Universal Design for Learning into curricula and materials can improve outcomes for all learners (Pisha & Coyne, 2001).

These principles and guidelines acknowledge that learner diversity is expected in the classroom and support teachers to proactively plan for this diversity at the development stage of instructional unit and lesson planning. Moving away from a one-size-fits-all curriculum and instruction model towards a diverse and inclusive model, Universal Design for Learning provides a framework for developing "best practice" instructional adaptations as defined by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2011), with principles and guidelines that operationalise instructional planning for the benefit of all students. By facilitating the design and implementation of a flexible, responsive curriculum, UDL offers options for how information is presented, how students respond or demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and how students are engaged in learning. UDL implementation allows all students to access, participate in, and progress in the general education curriculum by reducing barriers to instruction.

Rationale of Study:
This study aims to examine how Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School has integrated UDL into its curriculum adaptation and focuses on the adaptation for Children With Special Needs (CWSNs).

Objectives:
The objective of the study is to determine how the school adopted the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in their Curriculum Adaptation.

**Methodology:**
The study employed a qualitative approach through Descriptive Research Methods. The participants included the school's Principal and five Assistant teachers.

**Data Collection:**
Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires comprising closed-ended and open-ended questions were used to gather information.

**Analysis:**
The Investigators analysed the data collected from both the primary and Secondary sources, and the main findings are given below in two sections:

a) the Historical Background of the School and b) the Curriculum adaptation in the school.

**a) Historical Background of the School:**
yoti Sroat Inclusive School, under its current name, emerged from the compassionate efforts of a group of well-intentioned professionals and individuals in Shillong who aimed to provide educational opportunities for children with visual impairments. It was established in 1993 but soon came under the auspices of the Bethany Society. This transition marked a significant milestone in the history of disability services in Meghalaya. The Bethany Society possessed valuable resources, including experienced and trained personnel, and had a better capacity to secure funding during that time.

Initially, the school operated under "Integrated Educational Centre for the Visually Impaired." However, in 1996, it was renamed "Jyoti Sroat School for the Visually Impaired (JSS)" as it primarily served as a specialised institution for visually impaired children. The school's humble beginnings saw it operating from a borrowed dhobi (laundry) house owned by St. Edmund's School in Shillong and administered by the Christian Brothers. Later, St. Edmund's School generously donated the land on which the building stood to the Bethany Society. With support from the Government of Spain, Bethany Society constructed three buildings on the site. While one of these buildings is utilised by the school, the other two are used by the Divine Flame Hostels under Bethany Society's management. Consequently, JSS continued as a special school from 1970 to 2005.

However, the educational landscape for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) has evolved towards a more inclusive paradigm. Unlike the previous model of residential schooling, CWSN started attending local schools while remaining in their homes and communities. This transition reflects the shift towards mainstreaming education for CWSN, providing them opportunities to access learning and schooling alongside other children on a broader scale.
Subsequently, starting in 2006, Jyoti Sroat underwent a transformation into an inclusive school, opening its doors to all children. The student body now comprises children with disabilities, children without disabilities, and children from various vulnerable and marginalised backgrounds. These diverse students study together in the same classrooms with the guidance of specially trained teachers. Consequently, the school adopted its present name, "Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School," reflecting its commitment to inclusive education.

b) The Curriculum adaptation in the school.
Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School offers services from pre-school to higher secondary (Class XII). It follows the Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education Curriculum recognised by the State Education Department.

Since it is an inclusive school following the general curriculum set by the Board(MBOSE), the investigators want to find out how the school adapts the curriculum to meet the needs of the children, particularly those children who are termed as Children With Special Needs. The analysis of the adaptation of the curriculum was done on the following components:

i) Syllabus: The school follows the general curriculum set by the Board (MBOSE); however, the teachers adopted a simplified syllabus for Children with Special Needs (CWSNs).

ii) School subjects: The School subjects prescribed by the Board—English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Social Science (Economics, History, Geography and Civics Health Education), MIL (Khasi and Hindi), Computer Application and Environmental Education are being strictly followed.

iii) Medium of instruction: English is the medium of instruction; however, as per the needs of the children, the mother tongue, wherever necessary, particularly for children with language barriers and sign language for children with hearing impairment, is also used.

iv) Methods of Teaching: The teaching methods adopted in the school use multiple means of representation, expression and engagement suited to their special needs, as the Universal Learning Design emphasises. However, it also depends on the subject-specific. English teachers adopted narrative reading, listening interaction, comprehension using discussion, student responses, and writing skills. Storytelling and playway methods are used for lower classes, explanation, group discussion, peer-assisted learning, tutoring, questioning, group presentation and use of ICT.

v) Aids and Appliances: Adaptive Assistive devices, Aids and Appliances, Audios and visual videos, Slate and stylus, braille's, tactile maps and pictures, real objects and models, 3-dimensions pictures, daisy player which permits audio books and audio recordings of classroom lectures are being used according to the needs of each child following the Universal Learning Design.

vi) Co-curricular activities: Co-curricular activities have also been planned and conducted, keeping in mind the needs of every child. These activities include games and sports, literary, visual and performing arts.

vii) Evaluation procedure: The school has adopted the continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) mode of assessment. Evaluation in the form of a test is done every month.
for the children of classes I- VIII and the children of classes IX, and X. Evaluation is done in
two terminal examinations apart from class tests taken by the subject teachers.

Discussion:
Jyoti Sroat Inclusive School is a living role model of an inclusive school as it already has
children with Needs. The school has travelled a long journey of valuable service for more than
a decade from 1993 to 1996, named the Integrated Educational Centre for the Visually
Impaired. The name was changed to Jyoti Sroat School for the Visually Impaired (JSS)
since it was a special school for such children. From 2006 onwards, Jyoti Sroat evolved into
an inclusive school offering educational opportunities to all children and was renamed Jyoti
Sroat Inclusive School.

This was through exposure to International and National Conferences and Seminars
that urged to convert the school to an Inclusive One and with the backup of the members of the
G.B and the Managing Committee members. The students as of that year are children with
disabilities, children without disabilities and children from other vulnerable and marginalised
backgrounds. These children study together in the same classroom facilitated by specially
trained teachers. Jyoti Sroat School for the Visually Impaired (JSS)

There are 19 Trained Special educators, 07 Untrained General Teachers, 02 trained
Interpreters and 01 trained physiotherapist. The General teachers' academic qualifications are
B.A., B.Ed. and for the Special teachers class 12 with a Diploma in Special Education. Special
Teachers are always sent for training and exposed to International and National Conferences
and Seminars.

From the interaction with the Principal and the Teachers, the Jyoti Sroat Inclusive
School follows the Universal Learning Design. a) Syllabus: The School follows the general
curriculum set by the School Board (MBOSE); however, the teachers adopted a simplified
Syllabus for Children with Special Needs with the School subjects prescribed by the Board –
English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Social Studies (Economics, History,
Geography and Civics), MIL(Khasi), Hindi Computer Application and Health Education.
English is the medium of instruction; however, as per the needs of the children, the mother
tongue, wherever necessary, particularly for children with language barriers and sign language
for children with hearing impairment, is also used. The teaching methods adopted in the school
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Explanation, Group discussion, Peer-assisted learning, tutoring, questioning, group
presentation and use of ICT.

Adaptive Assistive devices, Aids and Appliances, audio and visual videos, Slate and
stylus, tactile maps and pictures, real objects and models, 3-dimensions pictures are being used
according to the needs of each child following the Universal Learning Design.

Co-curricular activities have also been planned and conducted, considering every
child's needs. Sports activities, music, quizzes and debates, role play, dramatisation, poetry
recitation, grammar games and group presentations are the different curricular activities students can partake in.

Students are evaluated continuously. Evaluation in the form of tests is done every month for the children of classes 1-8 and for the children of classes 9 and 10; evaluation is done in two terminal examinations apart from class tests taken by the subject teachers.

Conclusion:
In conclusion, it is evident that the innovative teaching practices employed by the educators at the school align closely with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). These innovative approaches play a pivotal role in fostering the holistic development of students. They promote a learner-centric curriculum in which teachers assume the role of facilitators. Through the application of Universal Learning Design, all students are granted equitable access to information and are empowered to express their understanding through a multitude of creative and personalised forms of expression. This commitment to UDL ensures inclusivity and nurtures a rich and diverse learning environment that celebrates each student's unique journey of discovery and growth.

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