



Normalization: Guiding Principle of Equal Opportunities in Education for Children with Disabilities in India

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Abstract:

The Principle of Normalization is instrumental in service reforms for children with Mental Retardation and other disabilities. Normalization calls for providing all the opportunities to all persons with disabilities which are available to a non-disabled person in society. Present paper focused on examining the principle of normalization from the view point of 'equality in educational opportunities' for persons with disabilities in Indian context. The paper critically analyses all the eight facet of normalization as described by Benjt Nirje. In the context of equal opportunities to persons with disabilities, Indian Policies also have similar connotations consistent with principle of normalization. The paper concludes with interpretation of the basic idea of Normalization Principle which is the base and guiding principle of special education services in India.

Key words: Normalization, Equality, Normal Rhythm, Equal Opportunities, Deinstitutionalization

Introduction

Persons with disabilities attracted the attention of the society after World War II. After World War II, many people returned to their homes with permanent disabilities. Patriotism and the increased number of persons with disabilities changed

the attitude of society towards this category of people and consequently towards children with disabilities as well and accelerated the rehabilitation services for them. Accordingly, after World War II, the United States (and similarly many other parts of the world) has made major strides towards the formulation of a social policy designed to improve the care and education of CWSEN. Policy represents the “broad plans, general principles, and priorities from which the programme stems.” (Cronbach et al 1981) From the middle of the 20th century, terms such as ‘deinstitutionalization’, ‘normalization’, ‘mainstreaming’ etc. have signified an ideological shift in policy making for CWSEN.

According to Zigler and Meuchow (1979) the terms have become the policy slogan for education and services provided to CWSEN. The first half of the 20th century saw the deinstitutionalization movement, a psycho-socio-political movement that had both physical and psychosocial connotations. Physical deinstitutionalization means the relocation of retarded persons from large public institutions and their placement in smaller community based residential facilities (Stedman 1977). The underlying assumption behind this movement was that community care would improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Psychosocially, deinstitutionalization was a process of countering institutionalization to reduce or eliminate these forces that compromise the interests or the integrity of the developmentally disabled. (Theile, Paul, and Neufield 1977). Basically the concept of deinstitutionalization gave a pace for integration of the persons with disabilities in the community. This aspect is further refined and formed the base for normalization and mainstreaming.

Evolution in the practice of normalization principle has brought us the concepts of mainstreaming, integration, inclusion, or more recently self-determination in the field of disability rehabilitation. The Normalization Principle is a strong advocate of ‘equality in education’ for persons with disabilities. The basic principles of special education as articulated in EACHA (Education of all Handicapped Children Act 1975, PL-94-142) like Zero Rejection, Nondiscriminatory Evaluation, Barrier Free Environment, Parental Participation

etc. have their root in the description of the Normal Rhythm of Life as mentioned in the Normalization Principle.

The Normalization principle:

We get the first reference to the normalization principle in 1943. In this year the Swedish government appointed a committee for the enhancement of the living conditions of “partially able bodied.” The suggestions of the committee were that these partially able bodied persons should have the right to avail all the services meant for the non-handicapped population which already existed in society. Their intention was that by availing the services offered to the non-handicapped citizens it would be possible for the “partially able bodied” to remain in society and lead a ‘normal life’. This achievement was quoted by the committee as ‘Normalization of the conditions of life.’

Further, the ideas of normalization evolved in the Scandinavian countries during 1950s-1960s, originated by Niels Eric Bank Mikkelsen. Bank Mikkelsen, who is known as father of Normalization Principle, was the pioneer of the deinstitutionalization movement in the Scandinavian countries. He firstly implemented his ideas of normalization in Denmark, during the 1950s to 1960s.

During this period there took place in Denmark the debate about the rights to a normal life of the persons with mental retardations. As a result, in Denmark the word got a legal value in 1959 and stated that the provisions for persons with mental retardation should make it possible for them to experience a life as near to a normal one as possible. Bank Mikkelsen described the ideological background to these intentions and thereby clarified the role of individuals with mental retardation in society. According to Bank Mikkelsen, “The mentally retarded individual is first of all a fellow being and so, he must from a view point of equality, have full rights as a fellow citizen.” (Cf. Mikkelson 1969) Again, Mikkelson pointed out the alternative, which is a consequence of not recognizing a person with mental retardation as a fully worthy person. “If an equality view point is not acknowledged there is a risk of ending simply in sentimental pity, in theories of over

protection, in group discrimination or in something worse.” (Cf. Mikkelson 1969).

Although the Normalization Principle was first implemented by Bank Mikkelson, as a concept it was developed and articulated by Benjt Nirje, a Swedish scholar, and given its first formulation in print in 1969, in the report of the President Committee on Mental Retardation. Nirje, as a representative of the Swedish parent association, participated very actively in service reforms for persons with mental retardation. His experiences during this period were summarized in the formulation of the normalization principle. Further, the Normalization Principle was reformulated, developed and being brought to USA by Wolf – Wolfensberger.

Definition and Meaning of Normalization:

At first Mikkelsen and Nirje both formulated the normalization principle by referring to persons with mental retardation. According to Nirje, “Normalization means making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to those of the mainstream of society.” (Nirje 1969, 1982)

In 1985, Nirje elaborated the definition by applying it to all persons with disabilities. He elaborated the concept as “Normalization means making available to all the persons with disabilities and other handicap patterns of life conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to or indeed the same as the regular circumstances and ways of life of society.” (Nirje 1985)

In his reformulations, Wolfensberger (1972) defined Normalization as “utilization of means, which are as culturally normative as possible in order to maintain and / or establish personal behavior, and characteristics, which are as culturally normative as possible”. (Wolfensberger 1972)

As distinguished from Nirje’s definition, which emphasizes normalization as a means, Wolfensberger’s definition emphasized both means and goals. In Wolfensberger’s reformulation, the goals of normalization have two dimensions:

a. Client normalization: To increase the functional independence of retarded persons so that they may be more easily assimilated in the community.

b. Environmental normalization: To modify environmental structures in order that individual differences among retarded persons can be accommodated into the community (Bjaanees, Butler and Kelly 1981).

Whatever Nirje or Wolfensberger defined as normalization principle is based on the ideas of Nirje's paper, "Normal rhythms of life" presented at the first IASSMD (International Association of Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency) conference held in Montpellier, France, in 1967. (Now it is known as IASSID: International Association of Scientific Study of Intellectual Disability)

Nirje's paper explains Normalization in terms of Normal Rhythms of Life. He described Normal Rhythms of life in eight facets. According to Normal Rhythm of Life, Normalization means opportunities:

1. To have a normal rhythm of the day (e.g. awakening, eating and retiring at a regular time)
2. To experience a normal routine of life (e.g. living in one place, working, attending school, and playing in other places)
3. To experience normal rhythm of the year (e.g. holidays, special family days).
4. To undergo normal developmental experiences of life cycle (e.g. family living, schooling, employment)
5. To express one's choices, wishes and desires.
6. To experience respect and heterosexual relationships.
7. To live according to normal economic standards.
8. To live according to normal physical settings

Normal Rhythms of Life and Its Implications to Equal Opportunities in Education with reference to CWSEN:

1. Normalization means a normal rhythm of the day - "Facilities must also give consideration to the individual needs for a personal rhythm allowing him to break away occasionally from the routine of the group." (Nirje, 1969) This first aspect of the Normalization principle argues (in the context of CWSEN) that a CWSEN has also the right to experience a normal rhythm of the day. This implies that a CWSEN should

experience all those rhythms of a day as those of a normal individual.

2. Normalization means a normal routine of life - most people live in one place, work or attend school at somewhere else and have leisure time activities at a variety of places. (Cf. Nirje 1969) Hence, under the philosophy of Normalization it is wrong when a person with disabilities has his school, training center, his structured therapies and his recreation activities in the same building that also serves as his home. Of course even when vocational activities are conducted in a special building it is not satisfactory if this consists only of a few hours of low motivated activities for a few days of week. With wider experiences and proper social training, the disabled persons thus will be able to use the normal leisure time facilities of his society on his own, and also learn to cope with unprepared and unstructured situations without panicking (Cf. Avedon 1967, Chigier 1967, Nirje 1967).

3. Normalization means a normal rhythm of the year - It means to experience the normal rhythm of the year including holidays and family days of personal significance. Most people change their life situations and refresh their body and minds at least once a year by going on vacations. Similarly, regardless of disability, a CWSEN has the right to enjoy his normal rhythm of the year, like a non-disabled peer.

4. Normalization means normal developmental experiences of the life cycle - This face of a normal rhythm of life is the strong advocate of equal opportunities in education with reference to CWSEN. As Nirje writes, children should have warmth of atmosphere, rich sensory stimulation, and surroundings and settings of proper proportions. Individuals with disabilities especially need to be fed with stimuli, which will nourish knowledge and abilities. (Nirje 1969) In case where a disabled child cannot live with his own family, this aspect is of special importance. In a normal society, small children live in a world specially structured for them, guided and taught by a few significant adults. In child care homes the changing of personnel should be minimal, thus offering the children basic security and opportunities for identification of the stand in parents (Nirje 1969). If we examine this sub-face, it implies the fact that childcare home should provide an appropriate

atmosphere to the children by offering safety, security and an environment with emotional touch to resemble as closely as possible the family environment. It also emphasizes the importance of early intervention programme, enriched with multi-sensory environment.

“Youths of school age in a normal society also live in the world specially structured for them. Childhood is a highly developmental period of great importance, for learning about one’s own personal abilities and potentialities; for obtaining understanding of oneself and for building self confidence that can serve as a sound basis for life after school years. Youngsters and youths of school age who are retarded should therefore never live in a confined setting together with adults with mental retardation because the young people socialization and impression of life should be gained as much as possible through contacts with normal rather than a deviant society.” (Cf. Nirje 1969). Hence we are seeing the strong advocacy of equal opportunities in education with reference to CWSEN.

Nirje clearly states that CWSEN should also be provided school age experience, like a normal child. It also pronounces about the socialization of the CWSEN via education through the peer group interaction and valued participation. When Nirje is saying “youngsters and adolescents of school age never live in a confined setting together with adults with mental retardation” it means that CWSEN should also be given opportunities to live with their peers and attend school in their appropriate school-age, like a normal child. In the real sense, this is the philosophy of inclusion.

5. Normalization means to express one’s choices, wishes, and to be respected - This face of Normalization principle without any question, advocates providing opportunity to express their needs and wishes and their right to get respect regardless of their deviancy, like a normal child.

6. Normalization means living in a bi-sexual world - Normalization also means living in a bi-sexual world and accordingly the facilities should be provided both for male and female on a non-discriminative basis. The meaning of this in the educational context is that of providing opportunity to experience co-education. It opposes segregation of children on the basis of gender because this is un-natural. Further mixing

of the sexes according to the normal patterns of everyday society results in a better behavior and atmosphere, as more motivations are added. (Cf. Nirje 1969)

In our point of view the mixing of sexes is not only useful for normal development of the CWSEN, but also it will be useful for them to save themselves from any type of sexual harassment or exploitation and also to plan their marriage in adult years.

7. Normalization means providing normal economic standards - This face of normal rhythm of life implies giving those basic financial privileges to CWSEN, which are also available to others. This includes provision of child allowances, personal pensions, old age pensions and minimum wages etc. If we look this face in the context of equal opportunity in educational context then this means that a school going CWSEN must be given some financial assistance/pocket money to spend as per his own. As Nirje states: “a normal amount of pocket money for the individual’s private use should be given regularly.” (Nirje 1969). It will assist the CWSEN in realistic social training and also helpful in fostering independent choices of CWSEN’s, just like a normal child.

8. Normalization of physical settings – This aspect implies that hospitals, schools, group homes, hostels and boarding homes should be as meant for normal person, facilities being available to both CWSEN and normal children in the same setting. Therefore all the essential services and buildings, like schools, hostels, hospitals, offices, and all other public places should have easy accessibility to people with disabilities. Normalization of physical setting as by Nirje in the 1960’s has the same connotation of barrier free environment as it is emphasized under Biwako Millennium Frame Work in the 21st century. To provide CWSEN equal opportunities we also need to bring about some changes in the physical structure i.e., we need restructuring the environment. This restructuring will facilitate these children accessibility to the entire community and benefit maximally from the exposure to the real environment. Exactly the same idea is reflected in the philosophy of inclusion. This philosophy emphasizes in-built mechanisms i.e., adaptations, in a regular educational system which facilitates learning experiences by CWSEN as Nirje

writes, “With normal location and normal sizes facilities for the persons with mental retardation will give their residents better opportunities for successful integration.” (Nirje 1969)

Conclusion

Normalization principle in its various interpretations is a social science theory that has had a profound positive effect on the lives of the people who were removed and segregated from the society due to their disabilities. It remains relevant in the 21st century in improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Normalization principle implies greater freedom and opportunities for satisfying the personal needs which persons with disabilities now can see within the small group.

The conclusion one can draw is that normal patterns and condition of everyday life are possible when the person has access to services available in the community. The basic principles underlying the concept of normalization will remain as a guideline for service development for persons with disabilities in 21st century too. The soul of normalization principle - the normal rhythm of life - strongly advocates ‘equality’ in the living conditions and so in education of CWSN.

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