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# Mutual Accountability, Mutual Respect: Combatting Social Exclusion With Academic Inclusion for Differently-Abled People at The Kiran Centre in Madhopur, Up, India.

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MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY, MUTUAL RESPECT:
COMBATTING SOCIAL EXCLUSION WITH ACADEMIC INCLUSION
FOR DIFFERENTLY-ABLED PEOPLE AT
THE KIRAN CENTRE IN MADHOPUR, UP, INDIA.

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Abstract

*Inclusive education, or school systems that cater to both differently abled students and their "normal" counterparts, has been heralded by the international community as a beacon of hope for improving the social mobility of disabled people. Educational institutions in India, though devoted to a fundamental human right, have excluded most people with disabilities at an astonishingly high rate. Rich qualitative research compiled about the experiences of this group of systemically disenfranchised people reveals the urgency of inclusive education as a means to change the social opinion and status quo. To illuminate the efficacy of this type of school, as well as its successes and shortcomings, observations and multiple interviews were conducted at the Kiran Centre; an inclusive school in Madhopur, Uttar Pradesh. Research suggests the value of professional development and teacher training for not only the benefit of differently abled students but also for the teacher and the classroom as a whole. Other themes of community membership as a means of accountability and social and emotional development were greatly revealing in considering the role of educational inclusion to combat social exclusion.*

Introduction

Social status in India is governed by the silent oppression of those that do not fit into the socially accepted norm; those that do not conform are subject to a certain rung of the socially constructed hierarchy. This oppression is often executed by depriving the lower members of society of the resources that are technically available to all Indian citizens. Anabel Diez, writing for *Disability and Society*, broadly defines exclusion as "a dynamic, complex social process entailing the negation of fundamental rights: economic, social, political and educational among others. It is generally agreed then that socially exclusive mechanisms are multidimensional in nature" (Diez, 164). Differently abled (disabled) people are one of these marginalized groups. The social exclusion that is thrust upon differently abled people in India comes in a variety of different forms and on a variety of frontiers-- from educational institutions to family units.

Conceptualizing and quantifying the very issue of disability in India presents many challenges. Singal writes "it is very difficult to find reliable data about the prevalence of disability in India. In general, the search...is an illusion, and the range of estimates, and their varied origins, makes it difficult to say very much with assurance about people with disabilities" (Singal, 5). Locating the body of literature within this challenge is important to understanding

both the immensity of the issue but also the lack of research in the field. Singal argues that much of the underreporting of disability is "due to stigma and a range of other socio-cultural variables" (Singal, 5). The nonexistence of information about disability, thus, speaks to the social climate and opinion of disability in India.

In the past several decades there has been a strong initiative to define, understand and implement inclusive education on a global scale. "Inclusive education" is a term that has been used, defined and redefined on many occasions; it has also frequently been interchanged with the term "integration" though the two should not be confused. Though there are many types of diversity in India, the term inclusive education speaks directly to the inclusion of differently abled youth in normal schools, rather than special schools. Diez provides a particularly striking definition of inclusive education, "a process which fosters participation and a sense of belonging for all students and, at the same time, seeks to break down the barriers behind exclusion" (Diez, 165). *The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA),* a scheme designed to ensure education for all Indian youth, defines "disability" as hearing impairment, mental retardation, locomotor impairment, learning disability, cerebral palsy, multiple disabilities and others.

What is known about the education of disabled students in India, however, is very contradictory. Singal quotes, "a recent study by the World Bank (2007), for example, noted that children with disability are five times more likely to be out of school than children belonging to scheduled castes or scheduled tribes (SC or ST). Moreover, when children with disability do attend school they rarely progress beyond the primary level, leading ultimately to lower employment chances and long-term income poverty." (Singal, 7) Even a glimpse of the dire circumstances faced by differently abled youth in India suggests that there is something greater that perpetuates this systemic power terrain and deprives innocent members of society of their

fundamental rights.

Themes that arose during the process of conducting research included professional development, social emotional learning and other barriers to implementing inclusive education. Defining and understanding the positives and negatives, the challenges and benefits of inclusive education can be started by examining works published around the globe on this theme. Bruns and Mogharreban have published two articles concerning the implementation of inclusive schooling in the United States from the teaching perspective. They write, "ECE practitioners need to understand their role as an inclusion facilitator. This role entails both classroom and non-classroom responsibilities. The latter includes working with related professionals... and families" (Bruns, 230). Their research illuminates the difficulties faced when undergoing the process of integrating a classroom, both for the adaptation of the teachers of normal classes and the special education teachers entering new teaching environments. Mogharreban asserts, "positive outcomes for all young children require a combination of knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices and inclusive attitudes and skills on the part of the teaching professionals" (Mogharreban, 407). As such, the development of successful teacher training programs that impart teaching professionals with the necessary techniques and methods is a key component of implementing inclusive education.

According to Singal, **"**there is currently no pre-service training offered to regular teachers' which familiarizes them with the education of CWSN; the focus is only on providing in-service training. Under SSA this training is varied and ranges from 1-2 days, 3-5 days or 45-90 day orientations." (Singal, 25) Teacher training and professional development is not only important for the sake of teachers. As this paper will show, the teachers' ability to facilitate positive learning and foster safe communities for the growth and development of their students is

indispensable.

Much work has been published on the importance of inclusive education in developing students' social and emotional learning. Teachers serve a crucial role in mediating the social experiences of their students. Solish et. al. write that the "educational context may be an especially important factor to consider when examining children's opportunities for developing friendships. Given that children with disabilities may be less involved in extracurricular activities than their typically developing peers (Solish et al. 2010), school settings may play a crucial role for children's social development and friendship formation, particularly for children with disabilities" (Reed, 478). From this, one can conclude that teachers in their training must be reminded that their job transcends the task of teaching; they must facilitate a healthy environment in which students with and without disabilities can work and play together. In fact, many of the skills that schools strive to cultivate can be seen to originate in the social activities of children and adolescents as well as in the classroom. Hartup, as quoted by Reed, states that the "existence of stable friendship predicts cognitive development in the areas of creativity, task-mastery, problem-solving, altruism, and overt cooperation (Hartup 1996)" (Reed, 478). In that these skills, such as problem solving and cooperation are crucial in the formation of a functional society, it is essential that all children and adolescents flourish in positive social environments.

Much research suggests that positive and safe environments are invaluable when integrating normal students and CWSN. Bruns writes, "as such, the inclusion of young children with disabilities in ECE (Early Care and Education) settings promotes both optimal developmental gains for young children with disabilities and positive social gains for typically developing children" (Bruns, 229). Two different trends were highlighted in the literature regarding social cohesion in inclusive schools. Bruns and Mogharreban evidence that a majority

of teachers believe in the dually beneficial results of normal and disabled students sharing classroom and playtime together. Moreover, they suggest that students also adjusted to and accepted their peers' special needs in the classroom. Mogharreban provides an example: "another ECSE student required a tray to define his work space. Within a week, typically developing Pre-K children requested trays for art activities. This assisted with greater participation in activities and an increase in sharing materials and turn taking" (Mogharreban, 410). This type of example suggests that when given the opportunity and proximity, students of any ability have much to share and learn from each other.

Contrary to Bruns and Mogharreban's observations, Reed conducted surveys and primary research with the students themselves that came to a different conclusion. "Students with disabilities were less likely to be nominated to be a first choice for sitting with at lunch, playing with at recess, or working with in a small instructional group. Students with disabilities were significantly more likely to nominate another peer with a disability over a non- disabled peer as a preferred play partner" (Reed, 486). Bruns and Reed's work together suggests that inclusive schooling techniques have different effects on the social, academic and developmental aspects of the students' education. Often these effects are dictated by the teacher's ability to create a safe social space for all students and to develop students' social skills. Other research utilizes different measures of disabled students' inclusion in inclusive classrooms such as the "Children's Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Rating Scale," or the "Peer Sociometric Status" (Langher, et al, 2296). These types of quantitative measures provide an in depth perspective primarily drawn from the students themselves, rather than the adults that observe them. This type of information can illuminate the successes and shortcomings of inclusive techniques though it does not speak directly to the long-term societal impact that inclusion can have.

Other sources referenced the main challenges faced when implementing inclusive schools. At a national forum in 1996, several main challenges were addressed including architectural barriers, transport and physical assistance, media awareness programs and rehabilitation services (Rao). Furthermore, the literature suggests a challenge of balancing the roles of resource teachers, special educators and regular teachers. Mogharreban recollects, "one of our most interesting realizations was that the children adapted very readily to their new classmates and situation; the adults, however, did not. Prior to the class-room transition... each [teacher] had clearly defined roles, routines and responsibilities. They were... now being expected to plan together, co-teach and document child progress using assessment protocols that were different from each other" (Mogharreban, 408). Singal refers to this confusion and these miscommunications as well; "the tendency to attribute the resource teacher as being in-charge of CWSN continues to frame them in an 'expert' role, where it is perceived that only these teachers have the requisite skills and knowledge to work with CWSN, further deskilling the regular teacher" (Singal, 27). Though it will always be necessary to train and educate teachers with skills specific to their future roles, the role of special educator and teacher should not be mutually exclusive. Much of the aforementioned conflicts and confusion over roles in the classroom can be mitigated through effective teacher training.

All things considered, this paper seeks to address the role of inclusive education in acknowledging, altering and hopefully eradicating the destructive negative stigma and stereotypes surrounding disability in India. This paper examines the implementation of inclusive education within one specific community that has effectively done so-- the Kiran Centre. This project specifically aims to better understand and to describe the current condition of disablement in India, to address the positive social climate at the Kiran Centre as well as to

determine students' ability to develop socially and emotionally. Additionally, this project aims to understand the necessary steps for implementing this type of a set up in the rest of India. This line of questioning allows for a better analysis of the efficacy of inclusive education in addressing the serious state of disenfranchisement and alienation faced on a regular basis by differently abled people in India.

The following paper intends to illustrate the dire state of disablement in India today. Primary sources illuminate the misunderstanding, mistreatment, alienation and ultimately exclusion of differently abled people from Indian society. While acknowledging that implementation of inclusive education is not a simple task, this paper brings light to the gravity of the situation. Ultimately, this paper seeks to emphasize that there is simply no alternative to inclusive education and that great strides must be made in order to make inclusion a reality for all Indian people.

Site Selection

*The sun is beating down as Kavita comes running out of the changing room pushing her friends' wheelchair… she is grinning and her friend, Supriya, is laughing hysterically. Kavita struggles to push the chair over a bump in the ramp and then resumes running with Supriya sitting in front of her. Kavita gently lifts Supriya out of the wheelchair and sets her by Louisa, the volunteer, who puts inflatable floating devices on Supriya's arms. Kavita lets out a whoop and hurtles into the pool, splashing water all over. Supriya joins Kavita in the water and they laugh and play with the rest of their friends (Field Notes, April 12, 2012).*

The Kiran Centre is located amidst the picturesque fields and villages on the outskirts of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. This society states, "Kiran's Vision is to be a Resource Centre that empowers differently-able children and young people, in partnership with their parents, by

providing quality service to them without discrimination of caste, religion or financial circumstances" (KIRAN, Annual Report 2010-11). Having briefly observed the Kiran Centre and its implementation of the vision of inclusive education, I was deeply moved by the cooperative and inclusive community that I found. In my short time there, I watched students with strong and able legs running through the playground with their friends confined to wheel chairs due to Cerebral Palsy (CP). Moreover, "the education department... pays careful attention to the special-education students so that they will not be left behind in their class. They give a healthy atmosphere to our classes without creating any kind of academic pressure" (KIRAN, 4). The Kiran Centre strives to weave academic and social development into one; therefore they are able to focus on the holistic education of their students. Additionally, the Kiran Centre is dedicated to maintaining the accessibility of it's facilities to all members of its community; there are very few stairs, the buildings are almost entirely one story, and the entire campus offers a variety of different opportunities to differently abled, as well as abled, people.

I witnessed remarkable relationships in my time at Kiran-- relationships that I had never encountered before. Conducting my project at the Kiran Centre meant that I would be living in a guesthouse in the village, allowing me to have immediate access to the school and the community itself. With this in mind, I was confident that I would be able to develop a sense of rapport with the community members; this understanding made my decision to select the Kiran Centre as my site simple. The Kiran Centre is more than just a school, it is a small community: it provided me with all of the necessary resources that I would need, as well as all of the necessary informants.  I became a full-time member of the community for the duration of my stay, this provided me with ample time to develop relationships with my interviewees before I formally interviewed them and it allowed me to informally observe the community at all times.

Methods

        The primary sources collected for this project were acquired through a range of qualitative research methods. In order to show the successes and shortcomings of the inclusive education system and its implementation, direct observations were arranged for the entirety of my stay at Kiran. I immediately began to conduct these observations, as I wanted to develop a sense of trust as soon as possible. I would walk directly from the Morning Prayer to Class 3, with the students, where I would take a seat in the back of the room next to several of the students and I would not speak for the next two hours. I observed the Sanskrit and Hindi classes, from 9:15-10:45 for ten days. The classes were not conducted in English, which allowed me to focus solely on body language, social and symbolic interaction, rather than the content of the class. I would bring a notebook to the class and quietly take notes of my observations; the novelty of my presence began to wear off after a couple of days and after the students discovered that they could not decipher my cursive. Given the size of the Kiran Centre (over 300 students), spending over twenty hours with one classroom of 18 presented me with the opportunity to create my own space at Kiran. My observations of class three allowed me to thoroughly understand the dynamics of a small sample of the student body. My time spent with class three also allowed me to feel a sense of belonging; I quickly became these students' *Didi* (big sister) and the teachers also gave me extra time, attention and information. While I was not observing, I volunteered during playtime, ate meals with teachers and students and worked on strengthening my ties with the community before my interviews began.

        I conducted eleven in-depth interviews at the Kiran centre with a variety of different members of the Kiran community. The purpose of these interviews was to develop a better understanding of the experiences of those facilitating inclusive schooling, as well as to collect

the direct observations of those who witness the challenges, benefits and other aspects of implementing inclusive education. In composing my interview guides, I hoped to learn about the presence of teasing and alienation of differently abled students. This line of inquiry stirred up the broadest range of responses, and the type of response reflected on the level of trust that I had developed between myself and the participant. I selected each interviewee with the guidance of my advisor, Satish Meshra, from the Human Resources Training Center as well as from the headmaster; therefore I interviewed four teachers, two administrators, a volunteer, one family, two women from the family center, and a caretaker from one of the hostels. Before I began the interview phase of my information gathering, I decided to develop a stronger relationship with the administration of the school; therefore, I began this process by interviewing both the Headmaster of the primary school and the Head of the Education department. I did not record any of the interviews because I quickly got the impression that the presence of even my interview guide led my participants to become more guarded. Therefore, I simply took notes on the papers that listed my questions, and frequently assured the interviewee that not only would I like this interview to be as casual as possible, but all of the information would remain confidential. Consequently, all of the names in this paper have been changed, I utilize pseudonyms throughout the project and any identifying details have been intentionally left out. In order to facilitate the process of assigning pseudonyms to interviewees, I have only assigned first names to each participant; the citations and interviewees will be referenced as such.

Based on the participant's English proficiency, Satish and I decided whether or not a translator was necessary. Two faculty members at Kiran volunteered to aid in translating when it was required. I struggled the most with asking questions about community or identity because these ideas are less concrete and thus are more difficult to communicate, especially in one's

second language. The location these interviews were different each time although several were conducted in the primary school's library; a venue that was a less than private venue. We were frequently interrupted by several other curious teachers; this created a unique dynamic but did not seem to significantly disrupt the interview content.

I grounded my research in background of social, developmental and educational theory, as well as a thorough understanding of the theories of symbolic interaction. Though I am well versed in these themes, my unfamiliarity with Indian society and education left me with little use for this knowledge.

Social Status of Disablement in India

*"One time I was talking with this boy who had graduated from Kiran, he has a disability, and he said 'we should just die, why are we here? We should not be'" (Rina, personal interview, April 23, 2012).*

The experience of constantly being ridiculed, hidden, and misunderstood takes an inevitable toll on the self-concept of differently abled people. Given the size of India, it is impossible to generalize about the status of differently abled people, however primary and secondary sources do point to marginalization, discrimination, shame and rejection: common experiences shared by differently abled people in India. A better understanding of these oppressive experiences is necessary to contextualize the role of inclusive education in Indian society. There are several different components of the social inclusion and exclusion of differently abled people that must be taken into account; the role of religion, the role of livelihoods and the role of education and academic potential. The marginalization of differently abled people in each of these arenas can be traced back to the negative stigma surrounding disability; all of which stems from a lack of awareness. This lack of awareness often compels

people to hold negative opinions of what they least understand, therefore different types of disablement incur isolation on a spectrum that generally follows the severity of the disability. Through all of this, it is important to consider the role of family in determining a differently abled child's experience of socialization and development. It is crucial, then, to consider these different factors while keeping in mind the implications of the family unit in coexistence with the differently abled person's experience.

Upon introducing a differently abled child into it's ranks, each family is faced with a critical decision: to include or exclude their child from their lives and ultimately, from society. Though it is up to the family to make this decision, the motives for choosing to exclude a differently abled child are not entirely under the control of the family members themselves. Dr. Raymond Lang writes "children with disabilities are likely to experience further isolation and exclusion from their local communities… some parents feel a great deal of shame, remorse and guilt because of their child's physical or cognitive condition. In such situations, there is a tendency for parents to attempt to shun away their children," (Lang, 299). There are many forces that compel families to shun, hide, abandon or disown their children that are greater than the family unit that are to blame for a child's exclusion from society.

Primary sources suggest that this is entirely accurate; one teacher remarked in an interview "80-75% of people don't want disability in their home, also they dislike the [disabled] children…the family is very upset" (Rina, personal interview, April 23, 2012). Remorse seems a natural response to a differently abled child, but what are the factors that provoke parents to feel shame or guilt? Much research has been conducted to prove that Hinduism has strongly influenced social opinion of differently abled people throughout India. The World Bank references a story from "the *Karthik Poornima,* where Lord Vishnu refuses to marry the

disfigured elder sister of Lakshmi, saying that there is no place for disabled people in heaven. The sister is instead married to a peepul tree" (World Bank, 22). The World Bank also reported that people who had originally responded positively to the inclusion of differently abled people in society later revealed "concerns for certain celebrations such as weddings that the presence of PWD may be inauspicious" (World Bank, 27). These types of messages and negative stereotypes fueled by religious texts are incredibly damaging to the development and social integration of people with disabilities.

These messages have implications for more than the individual that they are about: families and households with differently abled members become the next major target for social ridicule. Through my observations and discussions with different members of the Kiran Community, I came to understand that throughout India there is a pervasive belief that if a family has sinned or done something evil in their past lives, they will be cursed with a differently abled child. Therefore if a family has a differently abled member, one can rightfully conclude that one of the parents acted wrongly in a previous life and clearly deserved this punishment. Several years ago a study was conducted in Uttar Pradesh, the state that the Kiran Centre is located in. This study surveyed households containing people with disabilities (PWD) and people without disabilities, this study found that "for both households with and without a disabled member, around half the respondents believed that disability was always or almost always a curse of God" (World Bank, 21). Though, according to these figures, half of the population does not share this belief, this type of attitude towards people with disabilities and their families is highly destructive.

The family that I interviewed at Kiran explained to me, "It is society that is not ready to accept this kind of child, society might say the parent has done something wrong, they will exclude the child and family and blame the family for the child's disability" (Sripathi and

Pradhma, personal interview, April 23, 2012). When I asked the family about their "normal" son's opinion of disability, they explained, "his peer group asks many questions about his brother, like why does your brother rock while he's sitting, why does he do this, so it's very hard for him" (Sripathi and Pradhma, personal interview, April 23, 2012). What options do these accusatory beliefs leave for the unsuspecting families of children with disabilities? If the parents choose to include their child, they risk not only becoming social outcasts themselves, but they also risk subjecting the rest of their family to the same fate. Yet, if they wish to maintain their place in society they must disown or hide their child. Both options present serious ethical dilemmas.

To support the notion that poverty, disability and education are all interconnected, the researchers found that "households with a PWD had a 15 percent higher share with this belief [that disability is a curse of God] than households without a PWD member" (World Bank, p.1). Poverty, being one of the causes of disability, also presents a variety of challenges and even barriers to the acquisition of education. For families that are uneducated it is much less plausible that these harmful views and feelings of shame will be eradicated on their own accord. Without altering these damaging opinions, households simply cannot provide safe environments for their differently abled youth to learn and grow in a healthy fashion. These views, however, are not limited to families in poverty. Lang states, "I was told of an instance where one very high ranking civil servant had an 18 year old son with cerebral palsy. The father, because of his high social position was fearful of the public disgrace that would be inflicted on his family because of his disabled son, and had actually incarcerated his son in a bamboo cage for the first 15 years of his life" (Lang, 299). Though this seems a dramatic example, its existence reifies the notion that this type of behavior is not at all rare.

Other interviewees mentioned the social exclusion faced by differently abled people; their lack of participation in holidays, cultural events and social occasions. The World Bank reported "that people with disabilities attended only around half of social and religious functions and were often discouraged from attending marriages" (World Bank, 27). One interviewee explained, "in social events these differently abled people don't want to go to celebrate festivals; I remember I asked students when they got back from big festivals with their families and I ask them how was your celebration? And they don't reply with any enthusiasm or excitement and they don't seem happy" (Rina, personal interview, April 23, 2012). This quote speaks to the emotional toll that social exclusion can have on the self worth of a differently abled person. With all of these different forces conspiring against a shift in the perspective of differently abled people, India is left with the school system to do this job.

My research substantiates Lang's argument that a person's ability to contribute to the livelihood of a family unit has a direct influence on the family's willingness to accept their child. My findings suggest that those with disabilities are frequently underestimated and seen as not worthy of resources. Lang explains, "it was a commonly held perception that it was a waste of resources to educate a blind person to degree level, since they would not be able to fully participate in society" (Lang, 300). The challenges associated with acquiring and maintaining a job with a disability often lead to the neglect of children with disabilities and their exclusion from educational resources. Rather than viewing education and schools as arenas in which to challenge the negative stigmas of disability, differently abled children are often not afforded the opportunity to ever attend these institutions.

When asked to discuss his own experiences with disability before working at the Kiran Center, one of my interviewees explained, "most of the kids who had problems that I saw in my

community were staying at home and didn't even go to school" (Vikas, personal interview, April 16, 2012). The differently abled children, however, that do attempt to attend school are faced with a new onslaught of challenges. Primarily, the facilities and accessibility of these schools are not conducive to integration; one teacher, Sandeep, who is in a wheelchair explained, "the condition is very poor, the government makes facilities for differently abled people but then the people don't actually get it. People have no information, cannot get a quality education. The disabled life is not good, there are poor roads, trains, busses, the infrastructure, these things are not good for disabled people in India" (personal interview, April 19, 2012).

If a child can beat the odds and actually make it to school, they are routinely underestimated. He stated, "I thought that children who do not have a good IQ can not continue their study" (Sandeep, personal interview, April 19, 2012). Later he described, "I know people who like to go to school and read a lot but they can't because they have a bad condition and families don't expect more of these kids; these disabled kids think so much but they can not act on their thoughts" (Sandeep, personal interview, April 19, 2012). Sandeep described the frustration of going to schools that did not appreciate the abilities of the special students and in doing so, these students' interests, skills, passions and talents were wasted. Throughout my time at Kiran, in observing this teacher, and by speaking with many members of the community, I became aware of the social trend in which differently abled people are constantly underestimated-- these members of society are left to stagnate.

Education and Inclusion at Kiran

Schools serve as a valuable means for spreading awareness among youth about disability—the audience for this dialogue is not limited to young people. Teachers' roles as mentors and role models are not to be overlooked and should incite a special motivation to facilitate professional

development among school leaders whenever possible. One particularly insightful line of inquiry during my interviews was as follows: Before working at Kiran what was your opinion of disability in India? How has your opinion of disability changed since working here? This focus proved to be highly revealing, the training and professional development workshops that are implemented and conducted on a regular basis have played a large role in the shifting of attitudes among the teachers at the Kiran Centre. Teachers frequently explained that they had no exposure to disability before Kiran and made it clear how dramatically their opinions and expectations of differently abled people had changed in their time there.

William James, writing for *Special Education, Social Development*, states "teachers and peers tend to become more accepting of children with disabilities when they better understand the nature of the disability…a combination of information about, and direct contact with, disabled children provides the most powerful positive influence for attitude change in both teachers and in peer group" (James, 269). Before teachers can be exposed to children with disabilities, it is absolutely essential that they receive thorough and holistic training to prepare them to teach in a classroom that will most certainly have a different working environment than a non-inclusive classroom. With adequate teacher training, and professional development, such as in-services and workshops, any teacher can learn to conduct an inclusive classroom in a safe and positive manner.

Existing literature speaks of the value of professional development in high regards; this is no different for the Kiran Centre. The head of the education department explained, "we try to polish and groom these teachers through workshops," (Sunita, personal interview, April 18, 2012) and Sandeep remarked, "when a workshop is going on, if I feel a problem in class then I can present it and find a solution" (personal interview, April 19, 2012).  In an interview

conducted several weeks prior to my project, the headmaster cited the themes of different workshops that are organized on a need-basis so as to "improve the quality" of the students and teachers. The headmaster has undertaken the responsibility of determining what areas these workshops need to focus on and catering different activities to these needs; he does so by observing and analyzing the teachers in their classrooms. Specific workshop themes referenced by teachers included, discipline, student management, emotional wellbeing of students and creating equality in the classroom. Moreover, these workshops are all based on activity and group participation.

The community fostered during these workshops enhances the feeling of teamwork and reciprocity among the teachers, faculty and staff. The disposition of teachers is critical to the classroom climate and by developing teachers' sense of collective efficacy, interactive models of professional development pay off in the classroom. One teacher explained, "Before doing inclusive education, it is important to train staff in schools so if they have a fear, they feel a better understanding of how to handle helping students in difficult situations like passing urine or walking and if they are trained then they can be ready to accept children with disabilities and they can see and understand that someone with a disability might have other abilities and then their acceptance increases" (Sanya, personal interview, April 23). Releasing untrained and uninformed teachers into inclusive schools is likely to do more damage than the alternative; therefore the two ideas of inclusive education and professional development must go hand in hand.

Once inside the classroom, it is important for teachers to support the positive integration of differently abled students into the community. The teacher is provided with a valuable opportunity to not only facilitate the classroom but also to serve as a backbone of support and

confidence for those students that require it. Moreover, in doing so, teachers set a positive example for the members of their classroom. Literature from many different fields support the idea that teachers serve as role models for their students; Ishii writes about "imbibing virtues and humanistic values: if the learning sphere could be extended from the classroom environment to the social environment in terms of children's and youth's imbibing virtue and vice from the adults as the role models, the application of this principle might be justified in the larger context" (Ishii, 82). Teachers' behavior and dispositions reflect their attitudes that are often mirrored by their students; therefore teachers must be adequately trained to and sensitized to deal with a variety of sensitive issues that might arise in an inclusive classroom.

The concept of setting a positive example was captured perfectly during two of my observations in Class 3 at Kiran. One student with Cerebral Palsy, Satyam, played a major role in defining the class dynamic each day; his attendance, demeanor, behavior and health all contributed to the level of focus among the rest of the students and he was not always treated with respect when he made a mistake in class. I paid special attention to Satyam from the beginning of my observations, noticing when the class laughed at him and when they helped him. One day, Satyam was behaving especially distant from the classroom; he continuously rested his head on the desk, stared off into space during group activities and played with a pencil instead of taking down notes from the board. The teacher, having noticed his behavior, began to make a concerted effort to involve him in the classroom. My notes from the following occasion were as follows:

> "the teacher calls him forward… he is behind the teachers' desk, he reads the book out loud saying "A is for ____, ___ means ___!" and the whole class repeats after him. He has a forced voice but everyone understands and they go along with him. He is now even giggling a little, he is smiling and standing up straighter. He is slowly drifting farther away from the desk and the teacher has moved his wheelchair so he can have his hand on his back to keep him steady and still in his

space. The teacher is smiling and looking at me… everyone is listening and attentively repeating. Someone cuts Satyam off before he finishes a phrase and Satyam immediately responds with a joke in Hindi that quiets the misbehaving student. The teacher begins laughing hysterically, not at Satyam but from being startled and impressed, so does everyone else (including Satyam). He resumes reading and when he walks back to his seat the entire class claps and cheers "Sa is for Satyam, Satyam means_____!! He looks proud" (Field Notes, April 20, 2012).

The happy environment fostered by this teacher was a remarkable shift from the environment that we had all been sharing only twenty minutes before. Though this was not the first time something like this had happened, it was the most memorable, and after witnessing this instance I began to notice the more subtle support and tolerance exhibited by Satyam's peers. "The teacher asks Satyam to stand up and recite an answer. He messes up and everyone giggles… disheartened, Satyam sits down. The small boy sitting next to him whispers something to Satyam he rests one hand on Satyam's arm and convinces him to stand up; they rise together. Satyam hesitates, so the small boy gives him a hint, when he begins to feel confident speaking, the boy sits down and allows Satyam to continues on his own" (Field Notes, April 18, 2012). Looking back on these experiences, their teacher, Sandeep, remarked: "social time is important, they [the children] need more conditioning. One of my students [Satyam] has this bad experience and I supported him, I say to him so that he can imagine: you are a brave boy, and slowly he has accepted it" (personal interview, April 19, 2012). This positive reinforcement is a technique that aligns with much of James' argument; he places a strong emphasis on the value of the attitude of the teacher and subsequently of the students, it is their positive attitude that will enable a differently abled child to integrate successfully into the classroom (James, 268).

Through their training and professional development, teachers also become aware of the different methods that they can implement to improve all of their students' experiences. The ability to develop self-confidence among all students in a classroom requires experience but only

so much can be done simply through intuition. One teacher explained the different techniques that the faculty is trained to implement so as to engage all types of students and to encourage learning. He explains that they learn to identify the exercises that are especially difficult to differently abled students and then try to find an alternative way to learn the same skills. Different alternatives include, the play way method, multi-sensory toys, CDs and or videos (Vikas, personal interview, April 16, 2012). These methods are notably holistic, and regardless of the different needs of students, these are techniques that have shown valuable results in any classroom setting.

Another technique utilized by teachers at Kiran is the arrangement of the classroom so that students are always interacting; one teacher explains "I always arrange the other children so that they are sitting next to a person that has different abilities, so intelligent students are with the slow learners that way they both can learn together and from each other" (Rina, personal interview, April 23, 2012). This is a perfect example of one of James' suggestions; that teachers make use of buddy systems or peer assistance in the classroom (James, 270). This type of arrangement has proven to be very beneficial for all members of the classroom; James notes: "the environment should be arranged so that the child with a disability has the maximum opportunity to spend time socially involved in a group or pair activity, during recess and during academic work in the classroom" (James, 269). During this time, students are provided with the opportunity to develop peer relationships. Johnson notes, "Positive relationships with peers are related to academic achievement… the quality of students' relationships with peers has been found to be related to classroom grades, standardized test scores, and IQ" (Johnson et.al, 12). Therefore, in developing their students' emotional, social, academic and ethical skills, the Kiran Centre's holistic approach to teaching allows students to remain academically competitive while

also advance in many other components of their life.

The integration among "normal" students and differently abled students may come as a shock to children that are exposed to these classroom dynamics later in life, but to the majority of people that I interviewed at Kiran, it has been a normal aspect of their lives since day one. My findings lead me to believe that this is an essential component to the successful implementation of inclusion; students must be taught from the offset that they all are deserving of learning together and that all students must treat each other with the same level of respect. Teachers repeatedly assert that "these children grow up with disability around them, it is natural for them to help these people" (Louisa, personal interview, April 18, 2012). Inclusive settings are valuable in enhancing all students' social competency, or their ability to develop and utilize their social skills (James, 261). Peers play a fundamental role in defining the self confidence of students in the classroom, and primary sources suggest that there are many ways in which a differently abled child's social integration can and cannot play out in an ideal manner.

Shokoohi-Yekta et.al, defines friendship as "a social relationship between two people that is reciprocal, rewarding, and fun for both parties; it is a relationship that is characterized by multiple, voluntary contacts, and shared experiences across time" (Shokoohi-Yekta, 24). A differently abled child's ability to conform to the social norms that define the role of friendship are influenced by his or her social skills-- the different facets of their behavior and demeanor. James lists some of the most important as "eye contact; facial expression: smiling showing interest; social distance; quality of voice: volume, clarity, content; greeting others; making conversation, playing and working with others; gaining attention and asking for help; coping with conflict; and hygiene" (James, 277). James' research suggests that differently abled children with speech and communication challenges, physical differences or coordination problems are

the most difficult to integrate into classrooms (James, 269).

Though there is a wide variety of acceptance among students, the proximity of differently abled students to normal students is one that highly improves the likelihood that each group will develop friendships. Shokoohi-Yekta, et.al writes "we know that friendship can mitigate personal, educational, vocational, and societal challenges. Adolescent friendships and social occasions provide the venue for youths to practice age-appropriate skills (e.g., self- advocacy, leadership, conflict resolution) and develop interactive styles (e.g., dependence or independence, active coping or passive coping)" (Shokoohi-Yekta, p. 24). While differently abled students learn to develop many different skills needed to become a functioning member of society, their normal peers are also able to learn to adjust to a community that includes all types of children. One teacher explained her vision of the impact that these friendships may have in the long term; "when a differently abled child is here and normal child is in the same class, maybe that normal child will grow up and do one thing but he will always remember his differently abled friend. This will change society. Surely" (Rina, personal interview, April 23, 2012). Not only does Rina acknowledge that there is room for society to change, but she also identifies the social and academic proximity of normal and differently abled students as the source of this change.

It follows that these relationships are mutually beneficial; all teachers explained that "when differently abled kids are with "normal" kids they feel good because they want to play with normal kids and they are a part of society and because all will grow up eventually and be shaping society and their self perception becomes confident and secure because they are learning and living together" (Usha, personal interview, April 23, 2012). Several teachers that I interviewed remarked on the positive impact that these shared environments have on differently abled children, "whatever the environment is like here, they don't feel that they are disabled… this is

such a beautiful place that they have here… they are able to feel ok in any place, confident and able to enjoy" (Supriya, personal interview, April 20, 2012).

Additionally, the "normal" students' exposure to the different challenges of disability, such as adjusting calipers or helping a friend to and from physical therapy, removes sensitizes the students and slowly allows them to see these activities as routine and not worthy of stigma. In fact, most of the students become so comfortable with the different needs of their differently abled peers that they begin to regularly volunteer to help. One teacher recollected, "some of the students are very careful about bringing their friends' bags, helping them in the bathroom, in many ways they help each other together. It really touches me the most though when they bring a friend to the washroom" (Sunita, personal interview, April 18, 2012). Alternatively, differently-abled children have other abilities to share with their friends.  For example, one teacher explained that Satyam is remarkably knowledgeable about and talented with the computer. His friends are aware of this skill, and he gains confidence in his ability to reciprocate in his relationships. Less consciously "normal" children also benefit from these relationships because they are exposed to diversity and learn to handle differences maturely.

The opportunities for peer-to-peer support are boundless for the children at Kiran, and for other children in schools with an inclusive set up. Johnson and Johnson, two brothers who conduct much work on peace education and social and emotional learning discuss one specific type of behavior that is particularly resonant in the case of Kiran. They explain, "prosocial behaviors are actions that benefit other people by helping, supporting, encouraging their goal accomplishment or well being… prosocial children tend to build positive relationships with pees… engaging in prosocial behavior influence how a person thinks of himself or herself (i.e. moral identity)" (Johnson et.al, 20). My observations and interviews at Kiran suggest that the

community in itself fosters and encourages students to adopt prosocial attitudes towards their peers in any and all circumstances. The aforementioned mutual benefits of these relationships are the foundation of the Kiran community, and the main reason that it is so successful in including all people in its community.

<u>Successes and Shortcomings</u>

*"It is 8:59 am, the hall is packed, the entire Kiran community of 300 plus is sitting in neatly formed lines on mats on the floor. I look to my watch and at exactly 9:00 the music instructor takes in a deep breath, the children of class 3 are sitting in two rows on an elevated platform that faces the rest of the school. As the teacher inhales, all of the students sit up straight, place their palms together and begin to sing. The song, a prayer for peace, echoes through the hall; students in wheelchairs, teachers at the back, community members in calipers; all partake in this solemnly beautiful prayer meeting each morning. Starting off my day like this puts me at ease with the entire community, it is like someone has dusted the room in serenity" (Field Notes, April 21, 2012).*

The Kiran Centre takes great strides to develop a sense of unity and group inclusion throughout its community. From the luscious gardens to the ramps and one-story buildings, this school is incredibly dedicated to not only promoting accessibility but also promoting a sense of belonging and appreciation in and among its members. The morning prayers and the sense of community serve a valuable purpose: they foster group accountability and respect. One of the prayers repeated every morning, Om Shanti, was particularly resonant; every community member was invited to participate in this call and response mantra for peace. The fact that a school-wide effort to acknowledge the intrinsic value of peace is made on a daily basis speaks to the high emphasis that the directors of the school place on developing a sense of community and

caring. In envisioning a world of peace each day, differently abled students and their peers are provided an opportunity, whether acknowledged or not, in which to affirm the pressing need for tolerance and awareness about disablement in India. In his work about the different peace teaching tactics utilized by teachers throughout the United States, Joseph remarks, "students were encouraged to affirm life and the environment, and in turn, to feel affirmed… teachers helped students to imagine a world of peace… they explicitly developed a culture of peace in their classroom. Among their practices were meditation and peace visualization activities" (Joseph, 200). Developing a culture of peace at the Kiran Centre, in any classroom for that matter, is of the utmost importance when including differently abled students with others that may not be entirely prepared to deal with differences.

A culture of peace reinforces and strengthens group membership and feelings of reciprocity, support and unity. When asked to describe the community found at the Kiran Centre, every interviewee referenced the sense of support and love found at Kiran. "To do any work, we find encouragement through anybody, the students, the teachers, the staff… suppose you have to start a new project or something, everyone will participate willingly, they will help you. There is dignity, and positive energy, here there is joy and happiness above all" (Supriya, personal interview, April 20, 2012). This sense of support and validation is undoubtedly a result of the positive work being done and the sense of community that is reinforced each morning.

Some of the most fundamental components of a holistic learning environment give students the opportunity to develop socially, emotionally, academically, and ethically. All of these factors contribute to an adolescent's development and are crucial in forming a unified classroom. Johnson and Johnson, elaborate "one's personal identity includes a group identity that fosters loyalty. The worth of each member, including oneself, is based upon one's membership in the

human community; there is a basic and unconditional self-acceptance and acceptance of others. Members respect each other and themselves as unique individuals and appreciate the diverse resources members contribute to the group's efforts" (Johnson et.al, 21). In holding each other accountable and respecting each member of the community, Kiran creates a safe environment for the inclusion of differently abled youth and adults. One key point mentioned above, however, is the appreciation of others' abilities to contribute to the larger group identity. One teacher described this notion in her interview, "here at Kiran though, it is a good environment because the staff and children, they know from the beginning that if anyone has a problem, this person also has many good things about them, they have so many abilities and as soon as people come here they learn not to tease and they learn to search for the good qualities in every people, the abilities" (Usha, personal interview, April 23, 2012). The Kiran center seeks to capitalize upon its community members' abilities on a daily basis. Whether it is the students paying extra close attention when the boy who is knowledgeable about computers speaks, or the girls who nominate the best artist to do henna, or even the teachers all agreeing on the faculty members that would be most capable of assisting me by translating during my interviews. The community takes the time to understand the abilities of its members and in doing so they all acknowledge their weaknesses. Louisa, the volunteer, provided a perfect example, "The girls hostel has big and small girls, so it is like a small family. The girls in wheelchairs give lessons, the ones that can walk bring the food, and the girls that are Hearing Impaired cook. Everyone knows they have their own abilities and they try to help" (Louisa, personal interview, April 18, 2012).

The creation of this sense of group loyalty and unity is not limited to the morning prayer; there are many other aspects of the daily routine that deserve credit for this positive outcome. Another example could be found in one of the techniques frequently used during the class that I

observed; the teacher would notice the stress and anxiety among his students, he would tell them to sit up straight, relax and take five deep breaths. In this time frame, the students were given a brief opportunity for meditation and relaxation. The teacher's ability to be finely tuned to the emotional state of his students stems directly from the entire school's sense of collective identity. It is immensely important to acknowledge the teacher's role in reinforcing classroom climate through specific techniques.

As relationships between students generally transcend the academic or social spheres, it should follow that the benefits of positive peer-to-peer relationships transcend these spheres as well. There are specific techniques, however, that are notably successful in developing children's interpersonal and social skills while in the classroom, one such method is the use of group learning and the use of activities. These types of teaching practices and learning methods are crucial in helping students to realize their interdependence, or their own need for their peers to succeed. Johnson explains, "Positive interdependence should be structured at all levels of the school: cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson et.al, 9). These types of activities and group learning exercises can be found quite frequently among the classrooms at Kiran, specifically through the use of the play-way method and role play, teachers engage all of the students in collective learning experiences. During my observation of class three, in the weeks leading up to exams, the students did not engage in much group activity. James claims, "unfortunately while grouping and activity methods are common in the early years of schooling they are rather less common in the middle school or upper primary school." (James 280). Despite the lessening of group exercises and activities, the teachers managed to preserve and reinforce the positive learning environment among the students. On one occasion, Sandeep circled all of

the students at the front of the room, he explained to them that for the next two minutes they would do something different; they were instructed to hold hands and whenever they raised their hands they had to laugh as loud and as hard as they can, but as soon as they lowered their hands they had to be silent. The children absolutely adored this game and quickly burst into genuine uncontrollable laughter; the teacher was smiling and the classroom was filled with an incredible sense of positivity.

Outside of the classroom, as well, teachers must be able to facilitate inclusive games and activities so that all students can interact positively in their social spheres. James explains, "If social learning is to take place it is essential that the socially inept child has the opportunity to be truly involved in all group activities both inside and outside of the classroom…" (James, 270). The headmaster listed some of the outdoor physical games that the school implements, some of the most memorable included wheelchair and caliper races; in the wheelchair races, the physically abled children will push their friends in wheelchairs as fast as they can. Rather than rewarding any one winner, however, they make a concerted effort to never give prizes unless they can give them to the entire group. They also encourage ball-games in which students can throw the ball back and forth, the leaders of these activities will pair up physically abled students with students in wheelchairs and they will throw back and forth during these play times (Vikas, personal interview, April 16, 2012).

In terms of the accessibility of playtime, there is a large playground that is available for all students during free time; this play structure serves many different functions and has different areas that are available to each kind of student; in other words, no student is physically incapable of using this playground. Even the swings, for example, are wide enough to hold several students so that one student can simply sit while his or her peers help to pump the swing back and forth.

Another opportunity for outdoor play is the swimming pool; during the hot summer days, the school opens a shallow swimming pool in which different classes take turns playing and doing small swimming games. This pool nearly rids physically disabled children of their challenges and provided one of the most positive interaction between all students that I witnessed in my time at Kiran. Indoors, the children are encouraged to play board games, such as chess, Ludo and card games; all of these types of happy play environments are vital in allowing social development and growth among all students, regardless of ability.

Though Kiran is successful in so many ways, the implementation of inclusive education is not an easy task and it must be acknowledged that there are several areas in which Kiran could serve to improve. The expectation that teachers can perfectly manage any classroom is unrealistic, and especially in an inclusive classroom, a teacher must be prepared to cater to the unique demands of all of his or her students. With the diversity of ability found in each classroom, one will also encounter age differences, physical differences, learning differences, social skill differences, and more. In my own observations, I was confused by the distinct age difference that I observed: an eight year old girl would sit next to a hearing impaired boy who was not only twice her size but also twice her age. It would seem that the age differences, given the maturity levels and social skills that accompany development over time, would present one of the greatest problems, however Sandeep explained, "there is a great age difference in my class but their mental level is the same" (personal interview, April 19, 2012), he proceed to discuss the differences in their outside communities but continued to insist that the classroom dynamic was indeed not affected by age differences.

One of the main challenges that teachers referenced was their struggles to deal with the time constraints presented by differently abled children's physical therapy or "physio." I

observed that the same students would often miss more than one class a week to attend to their physical therapy needs, and the teacher would be rushing to even review those students homework before the next class began. These teachers would then have to take extra time to review missed class material with the students. Aside from age differences and time constraints, Sandeep listed some of the actual challenges that he faces: "in my class there are some hearing impaired students, some with polio, some with CP, some students that won't listen, some that will listen but will not write, and some that have behavioral problems" (personal interview, April 19, 2012). Being adequately prepared to handle a classroom with such a spectrum of needs is not an easy task, this is a skill, however, that can be improved with practice and experience over time. This wide range of demands naturally falls into several categories that teachers must address— communication and teasing.

Communication appeared to be a particular struggle for the teachers at Kiran, less of a struggle because of the multiple different communication styles but more a struggle because of the time it takes to manage a classroom with a variety of different communicating abilities. Primarily when referencing these communication challenges, teachers spoke of the inclusion of Hearing Impaired students in regular class. It is notable to mention that the students, faculty, staff and community members at Kiran are all capable of communicating with a unique hand-foot language. It is so commonly used within the community that I even began to pick up several of the gestures in my short stay there. There is a difference, however, between basic communication with this form of sign language and teaching an entire class with sign language; much can be lost in translation.

Specifically in the Sanskrit class, I became acutely aware that the hearing impaired students were simply not included in this class, based on their inability to learn another language.

Instead of participating in the class, they usually would leave to work on a project, or the teacher would provide them with a class-work assignment on another subject to keep them busy. Though the teachers were able to sign to the HI students whenever they needed to communicate a message or give an assignment, during the classes that I observed, the teachers did not sign the content of the entire class to the HI students. One woman that I interviewed who does teach to both HI students and hearing students in the same class explained that because she had to teach science and her other subjects in an English medium, it was difficult to make the HI students understand the content of the subjects that she was teaching. On several occasions, however, I observed as the Sanskrit teacher included both HI students with their Hindi assignment in an activity that also involved the Sanskrit class. Though they were learning different languages, the teacher synchronized the actual subjects of their studies so that vocabulary overlapped. My notes from one such instance were as follows, "the teacher writes something on the board and calls all three Hearing impaired girls to the board to write. They are writing in three columns. When they finish they look at them and at each other and fix a few things after discussing among themselves. The teacher is saying something to them the teacher then goes up to the board and starts talking to the whole class; he is talking to class and also checking everything on the board. Although he is engaging HI students, everyone in the class is also paying attention" (Field Notes, April 23, 2012). These teaching techniques, however, do require teachers to put in an extra effort to include all of their students that can ultimately strain the teachers in their roles.

Finally, it is vital to acknowledge that teasing is a type of behavior that occurs in classrooms of any form around the globe; Kiran is not an exception to this fact. Implementing inclusive schools comes with the risk that students will lack the maturity and foresight to avoid teasing and negative behavior toward their different peers. This behavior occurs on a wide

spectrum, less extreme cases that I observed were the muffled giggles of the class after a student made a mistake. I recorded the most extreme example that I witnessed in my field notes, "today Amit is back from his home, aside from being in a wheelchair he also has one hand that he can not use, and it is permanently clenched, it looks like a snake. The kids now call him snake to his face which causes him to wave his hand, making him look even more like a snake. Amit isn't always the friendliest child; he tips over people's things, picks on the kids that are younger than him and generally does not bring much positivity into the environment. His negative demeanor does not help him when the children are teasing him because he doesn't have a lot of friends… if one kid starts teasing him, they all do… then who is there to defend him?" (Louisa, personal interview, April 18, 2012). James suggests strategies for identifying and addressing problem behavior in the classroom, he states "identifying children are neglected by their peers or become an object of ridicule and teasing… is the child in question openly obnoxious to others through aggression, hurtful comments, a tendency to spoil games or interfere with work?" (James, 265). This is a form of "naturalistic observation," or a skill that a teacher can utilize to observe the social dynamics among students in their classroom so as to address or rectify any specific issues. My own use of naturalistic observation allowed me to understand that Amit's case is a more extreme example of the types of bullying or teasing that can happen, and even a very basic understanding of psychology suggests that Amit's angry personality is likely related to the behavior of his peers.

More importantly than the actual examples of teasing, however, it is important to focus on what the teachers do to combat this type of behavior. In discussing teasing with the teachers that I interviewed, I found it particularly difficult to convince these teachers to open up to me and actually discuss this subject with me; the teachers that actually were willing to share, however

provided valuable insight. The Sanskrit teacher that I interviewed, for example, explained his unique method of confronting teasing in his classroom; "if a child makes a mistake answering a question and the kids laugh I look around to see who is laughing. Then I ask them to stand up and ask them a hard question that I know they can't answer. Then they have to stand there in silence because they don't know the answer and they learn not to laugh" (Sandeep, personal interview, April 19, 2012). He also explained that if he suspects that a student is misbehaving, he has them come to the front of the room to sit near him so that if they wish to misbehave again, he will be able to notice and can then respond appropriately. These types of subtle responses are effective in proving a point without ostracizing or strongly embarrassing either child in the process. The volunteer that I interviewed actually explained that most of the children avoid teasing other students because their own acceptance in the Kiran community is not worth risking for the sake of teasing someone else; this is to show that the collective identity of the community serves to hold students accountable for their words and behavior. In fact, a group of scholars writing about bullying prevention states, "researchers have shown that school-based bullying prevention efforts can positively enhance school performance and achievement…" (Swearer, 39). Even with the existence of bullying, or teasing, the opportunities for teachers to create learning moments for their students are boundless. With the proper training and experience, teachers will develop the skills to navigate even the trickiest situations. To never provide teachers with these opportunities, however, is to deprive all students of the highly valuable that they could receive in an inclusive school.

Discussion

Despite the apparent challenges that accompany implementing inclusive education, the alternatives-- exclusion or separation-- are simply not viable options. The SSA, though intended to provide equal education to all Indian youth, leaves room for confusion between inclusive

schools and special schools; the World Bank explains, "a specific feature of SSA is a zero-rejection policy.  This suggests that no child having special needs can be neglected…The PWD Act provides, however, a loophole …  It states that children will be educated in an "environment, which is best suited to his or her learning needs" and that it is possible that the special needs of a child compel him or her to be educated in special schools" (World Bank, 60). In order to better understand the urgency of implementing inclusive, rather than special, education, one must consider the role of peer-motivation and validation in differently-abled students' development of self concept. In each of the themes mentioned throughout this paper— interpersonal skills, professional development, academic achievement, and social inclusion, to name a few— an inclusive set up is vital to the successful development of each.

Most importantly, though, the social acceptance of differently abled students is intrinsically related to the proximity and thus actual opportunity to develop friendships with their "normal" peers. As one teacher explained, "when they [differently abled children] are academically as well as socially accepted, it builds confidence. They feel, I am a part of society, I have a meaning in my life. I am an accepted person" (Sunita, personal interview, April 18, 2012). Both social acceptance and inclusive schools go hand in hand; social acceptance requires sustained exposure to differently abled peers and inclusive schools cannot be successfully implemented without social acceptance. By physically distancing "special" students from their peers, either in separate classrooms or in separate buildings, educational institutions send a clear message of inequality. Research has revealed that "students served in special schools have fewer friends and respond more passively to loneliness than students in mainstream schools… the most frequent reason students report for not having a friend with severe disabilities is limited opportunity for interaction" (Shokooha, 25). To physically separate differently abled students from their peers is

to provide an institutionally demarcated barrier between the two groups.

The educational system reinforces the notion that children are not all equal. Not only are they unequal but they also deserve separate educations. One interviewee explained, " at Kiran, students realize that disability is not a curse, these children need school to polish and groom them so they can also live a graceful life and reach their self potential" (Surita, personal interview, April 18, 2012). Not only will students not be able to realize their own potential at a school limited to children with similar abilities, but they will not develop in the same social context as the other members of society that they will ultimately be expected to interact with. As Sandeep puts it, "it is my experience that kids can go to school and have all of the resources that they need but they may not understand community life… when they leave the school they will be expected to be a part of the community, but they will not fit in" (personal interview, April 19, 2012). This suggests that special needs provisions and special schools are inherently flawed in that they don't allow for differently abled youth to socialize alongside their peers. Without allowing children to socialize together and learn to make room for each other in society, this process of social intolerance will be perpetuated.

Furthermore, children that are separated into special needs classes and schools will not be encouraged to realize their own academic potential. Sandeep explained, "it is really necessary to include all children together, if physically challenged kids are separate they will think, well I'm not normal, so what can I do?" (personal interview, April 19, 2012). My interview with the family of a differently abled student at Kiran allowed me to better understand that his family had not willingly removed him from a normal school; the normal school was incapable of supporting and accepting this child, despite his genuine attempt to succeed there. The father explained, "when he was going to school (for about one month) he began to imitating learning, he would do

what the other students would do, imitate writing, try to open his notebook, but when they said that he did not belong at that school and he stopped attending, he became more involved in himself. He became interested in self stimulation and not interacting with the rest of the world" (Sripathi and Pradhma, personal interview, April 23, 2012). In this emotional recount of their child's struggle with an exclusive school, one can realize how truly necessary inclusive education is for all children in India. The beauty of the Kiran center is that "when differently abled children come here they see the other opportunities they can have, only they don't have to learn everything to adapt to their environment, the environment here adapts to them" (Sanya, personal interview, April 23, 2012).

In terms of better understanding the process of conducting research, this project revealed significant findings about the many constraints encountered when researching in a foreign country. Several observations were particularly enlightening in this project, especially the nuanced dynamics between interviewee, interviewer, translators and observers. I often had to conduct interviews that felt forced, and I learned to readjust questions so that my interviewees did not misconstrue my intentions. Additionally, the Kiran Centre's sense of solidarity and group membership is also accompanied by a sense of loyalty. This is to say that when asked to comment on the less attractive aspects of the schools-- teasing and bullying, for one— interviewees who had not fully developed a sense of trust before the interview often denied that these types of problems even existed. Conducting this type of research in any comprehensive manner requires a broad sweep of informants and this process allowed me to appreciate researching in my own country.

Looking Ahead

The Kiran Centre prides itself on its attempts to spread its message of peace, inclusion and

acceptance for all people, regardless of their ability. The school does this by inviting visitors, distributing pamphlets and trying to ignite discussions about inclusive education throughout India. When I asked whether inclusive education was an attainable goal for the rest of India, Vikas said "Yes, that's why we have just started training center. So that our students will go and make others aware that inclusion is possible, sometimes we invite others (teachers and kids) to see our classes and activities and then they ask us how they can help disabled kids. We have to show them our activities and welcome others in Kiran to show that it can be done" (Vikas, personal interview, April 16, 2012). In doing so, the Kiran Centre sets a positive example for other schools, institutions, and the government to show that inclusion is not only a reality for private schools. In fact, many teachers and interviewees mentioned private institutions' hesitations in accepting and including students with disabilities. The move towards inclusive education is not merely a public school issue; it is relevant to any educational institution.

Conclusion

If there is a desire to improve the social climate in India, changing the miniature reflections of society found in schools must be the first step. In order to implement inclusive education successfully, the teacher training and professional development system must be restructured, providing the perfect opportunity to rethink the role of education as a whole. One teacher asked me, "Why don't we put these children together from the beginning so they can accept each other right away?" (Usha, personal interview, April 23, 2012). This simple question eliminates the complexities and nuances of society and points to the very real truth: if all children were included in society from the beginning, there would be no need for initiatives to include differently abled children later in life. Inclusive education is absolutely fundamental to the movement to improve the social situation for differently abled people in India. Often, the school

system is described as a mirror of society: the complex relationships and hierarchical structures found in society can often be found within a classroom. Yet, schools are composed of children and adolescents that have not necessarily learned and accepted the tremendously hegemonic and oppressive ways of society. This generation of children will soon become leaders of society, and it is of the utmost importance that their educations are holistically imbibed with emotional, academic, ethical and social development from the start.

Recommendations for Further Research

Much research can be done in the field of inclusive education in India; first and foremost there is a vast void of quantitative research that illustrates the full picture of inclusive education. It is nearly impossible to find comprehensive information that shows where and how inclusive education has been implemented. These figures are vital to better understanding this issue on a wider scale. Furthermore, there is very little longitudinal research focused on the impact of inclusive education in any context. All things considered, there is very little research about inclusive education in general and it is an issue that is highly relevant in India and globally. Qualitative research provides priceless insight into the different mechanisms of implementation and teaching, however in order for the government or other institutions to successfully realize the value of inclusive education, conclusive statistics that highlight the minimal opportunities for education for differently abled students are vital. It is safe to say that this field is desperately in need of more research on all fronts.

**Location:**
**Time:**
**IV#:**
**Pseudonym:**
**Teacher Interview**

My name is Audrey Wilson (Arti) and have been at Kiran to work on a project for my study abroad program. In America I am studying Sociology and Education and my program, SIT, led me to Kiran. Spending four days at Kiran a few weeks ago, I was inspired by the sense of community that I observed amongst the students, and in my project I am studying how integrated, or inclusive, schooling impacts this sense of community. I would like to conduct an interview with you, it is meant to be more discussion based with guiding questions that I have listed on my paper. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or do not wish to answer a question, please tell me and we will move on! With your permission, I would like to record this conversation so that I can focus more on our conversation and less on taking notes. My notes and the recording will be totally confidential, so I assure you that all names will be changed and the recordings will be destroyed after I have used them. Do you have any questions?

**Background:**
What is your name?
M/F?
How old are you?
Where are you from?
Up to what level of education have you reached?
How long have you worked at Kiran?
What is your job description?
Did you teach anywhere before Kiran?
    If so, could you describe to me the differences that you have observed between the two?
9. Can you describe the Kiran community to me?
**Disability:**
Before coming to Kiran, how did you feel about disability in India?
What do you think the social opinion is of disability in India?
    Can you give me an example of the social challenges that differently abled people might
        face?
**Training:**
11. Did you receive any training about teaching in an inclusive classroom before starting your job?
    Can you explain the workshops to me? Is there any thing re: inclusive schooling that is
        particularly memorable for you?
What is the one thing you wish you could have learned about managing integrated classrooms and social spaces?
What resources do you have as a teacher?
**Inclusive Education:**
What are the biggest challenges that you face with teaching an inclusive classroom?

Can you give me an example?

Can you tell me about inclusive education at Kiran? What does it mean to you?

How many differently abled students are in your class and how many normal students do you teach?

How do you see differently abled students and normal students interacting in your classroom?

Can you give me an example?

Is there anything you would like to change about this interaction?

Are there any special relationships between normal and differently abled students that you can think of to help clarify the picture?

If so, can you tell me about them?

19. Is there ever any teasing, bullying or discrimination among students in the classroom? How is this combated?

20. How has social and academic inclusion affected students' self concept?

**Social Aspect:**

Can you describe play time to me?

How do differently abled students interact with their normal peers during physical activity?

Can you tell me about collaboration between the students?

Is there ever any teasing, bullying or discrimination among students? How is this combated?

**Conclusion:**

What impact do you think Inclusive education has on the students' perception of disability?

Do you think inclusive education could be implemented in the rest of India?

Why? Why not?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think might be relevant to my project?

Do you have any questions for me?


Thank you again, for your time, I can see that you are very busy here! I truly appreciate your help, if you have any questions or think of anything else that you would like to talk about, feel free to contact me. My number is on the sheet that I have given you. Thank you!

**Location:**
**Time:**
**IV#:**
**Pseudonym:**

## Caretaker Interview

My name is Audrey Wilson (Arti) and have been at Kiran to work on a project for my study abroad program. In America I am studying Sociology and Education and my program, SIT, led me to Kiran. Spending four days at Kiran a few weeks ago, I was inspired by the sense of community that I observed amongst the students, and in my project I am studying how integrated, or inclusive, schooling impacts this sense of community. I would like to conduct an interview with you, it is meant to be more discussion based with guiding questions that I have listed on my paper. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or do not wish to answer a question, please tell me and we will move on! With your permission, I would like to record this conversation so that I can focus more on our conversation and less on taking notes. My notes and the recording will be totally confidential, so I assure you that all names will be changed and the recordings will be destroyed after I have used them. Do you have any questions?

**Background:**
What is your name?
M/F?
How old are you?
Where are you from?
Up to what level of education have you reached?
How long have you worked at Kiran?
What is your job description?
Can you describe the Kiran community to me?
**Disability:**
Before coming to Kiran, how did you feel about disability in India?
 What do you think the social opinion is of disability in India?
How do you think differently abled students' self perception changes over time with social and academic inclusion? (confidence, etc.)
How do you think normal students' self perception and perception of disability changes?
**Social and Living Time:**
Can you describe the Hostel community and the play time community to me?
What types of relationships do you observe between the students?
Are there any cross-ability relationships that stand out to you that you could share with me?
Can you think of any specific examples of normal and differently abled students playing and living together?
 Do you ever have to deal with teasing, bullying or exclusion of differently abled students at Kiran?
How do you think families with differently abled children change in their mindset about disability throughout their time at Kiran?

What is your biggest challenge in your role?

**Conclusion:**

Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think might be relevant to my project?

 Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you again, for your time, I can see that you are very busy here! I truly appreciate your help, if you have any questions or think of anything else that you would like to talk about, feel free to contact me. My number is on the sheet that I have given you. Thank you!

**Location:**
**Time:**
**IV#:**
**Pseudonym:**

### Parent Interview

My name is Audrey Wilson (Arti) and have been at Kiran to work on a project for my study abroad program. In America I am studying Sociology and Education and my program, SIT, led me to Kiran. Spending four days at Kiran a few weeks ago, I was inspired by the sense of community that I observed amongst the students, and in my project I am studying how integrated, or inclusive, schooling impacts this sense of community. I would like to conduct an interview with you, it is meant to be more discussion based with guiding questions that I have listed on my paper. If you feel uncomfortable at any time or do not wish to answer a question, please tell me and we will move on! With your permission, I would like to record this conversation so that I can focus more on our conversation and less on taking notes. My notes and the recording will be totally confidential, so I assure you that all names will be changed and the recordings will be destroyed after I have used them. Do you have any questions?

**Background:**
What is your name?
M/F?
How old are you?
Where are you from?
Up to what level of education have you reached?
How many children do you have at Kiran? How long have they been students there?
What kind of ability does your Kiran student have? (Normal or disabled?)
Can you describe the Kiran community to me?
**Disability:**
Before your child became a student at Kiran, how did you feel about disability in India?
 What do you think the social opinion is of disability in India?
How do you think differently abled students' self perception changes over time with social and
     academic inclusion? (confidence, etc.)
How do you think normal students' self perception and perception of disability changes?
How has your son/daughter's confidence in his/her ability since attending an inclusive school?
Does your child ever mention being teased or made fun of because of his/her disability?
Does your child have any special friendships with normal students?
Since your child has attended Kiran, how has your opinion of DA changed?
**Conclusion:**
Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think might be relevant to my project?
 Do you have any questions for me?
Thank you again, for your time, I can see that you are very busy here! I truly appreciate your help, if you have any questions or think of anything else that you would like to talk about, feel free to contact me!

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