

# Occasional Papers

## Right to Quality Education through Social Inclusion

A Study of Two Private Schools in Delhi

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17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi-110016, INDIA

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## CONTENTS

1.	Abstract	1
2.	Introduction	2
3.	Objectives	3
4.	Methodology	4
5.	Understanding Social Inclusion	5
6.	Profile of the Schools	8
7.	Implementation of the Act	10
8.	Challenges Encountered	13
9.	Schools' Responses and Strategies	16
10.	Perceptions of the School Personnel	21
11.	Understanding Childrens' Perspectives	24
12.	Perspectives of the Parents	27
13.	Classroom Observations	31
14.	Summary and Conclusion	33
	References	36



# Right to Quality Education through Social Inclusion

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### *Abstract*

*The provision of twenty five percent reservation in private schools under RTE for children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups has garnered much debate among researchers as well as the common people. The overarching goal of such provision is to promote social inclusion that recognizes the diversity of students and makes the disadvantaged and culturally distinct groups to be equal members of the society. Through this provision, the onus is on the private schools to promote inclusion and equality. There are several apprehensions prevailing around this provision as to who will avail this quota, how do the schools respond to such provision and the ways teachers negotiated with the diversity in the classrooms. The present paper, based on the empirical study of two private schools in Delhi, reflects on the same. It also tries to put forth the perspectives of teachers, parents and students towards this provision. On the whole, the attempt is to understand the extent to which the schools played a facilitating role in responding to the diversity of students and easing the process of inclusion.*

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## **Introduction**

The stratifications in Indian education system are easily discernible just like the stratifications in the Indian society. Access to quality education has, to a great extent, been class-based, wherein people belonging to upper and middle class send their children to high-fee charging private unaided schools. Contrary to this, a majority of parents belonging to lower socio-economic strata have been observed attending to government schools. Amidst this marked divide, a recent trend has been emerging where lower income group families are sending their children to low-fee or low-budget private schools due to their optimistic attitude towards education (Tooley, Dixon and Gomathi 2007; De et al 2002).

Amidst this scenario, quality education has remained elusive. Exclusivity prevailed in a manner that only privileged could manage to gain access to quality education. This has significantly impeded the process of development. Against this backdrop, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 was enacted. The Act is envisaged as landmark legislation in the history of India which provided every child a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality. Amongst many provisions enlisted by the act, one important provision has been to promote inclusiveness and equity in education. In order to transform this to a reality, an important clause under this Act states that all private schools should admit in class I (and in pre-school education, if the school imparts), to the extent of at least 25% of the strength of that class, to children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups from their neighborhood. The schools should provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion (GOI, 2009).

One needs to look into detail certain aspects within the Act in order to implement it. In respect of children in classes I to V, parents can seek admission of their children in a school established within a walking distance of 1 km of the neighborhood. This radius can be extended if the number is not filled up within the customary 1 km radius. The Act says ‘at least 25%’ instead of ‘at least and no more’, which implies that a school could offer to take more than 25% children. The logic behind setting the 25% bar is that without forming a substantial proportion in any one class, these disadvantaged children

might feel alienated. Adversely, that could possibly lead to a lesser degree of participation in classroom interactions. Admission of such children in Class 1 or earlier was kept mandatory as it was thought that this would help the academic, social and psychological adjustment of these children. Thus, in the light of such provision, the onus lays on private schools to promote inclusiveness, diversity and equality.

Several apprehensions prevailed as to who would avail the 25% quota; whether these children would be treated properly in schools; would they be able to adjust with higher socio-economic group children or they might end up developing inferiority etc. Role of schools, therefore, became crucial in ensuring the effective implementation of the Act in its premises. Against this backdrop, there is a need to understand the intricacies of such an initiative. Firstly, it is imperative to understand the socio-economic background of these students. Secondly, since those admitted under 25% reservation system might be socially and culturally distinct, there is a need to understand to what extent the school played a mediating role to assimilate their needs and how did teachers negotiate with EWS children and parents to meet educational needs of the school. Thirdly, there is also a need to understand the problems faced by the teachers and parents over this initiative. Evaluation of all these factors lead us to know the extent to which the schools played a facilitating role in responding to the diversity of students and easing the process of inclusion. The present paper, based on an empirical study of two schools, attempted to reflect on the same.

### **Objectives**

Based on the above mentioned issues, the following objectives were framed for the study:

- To study the socio-economic background of the students admitted under 25% policy;
- To delineate various inclusive practices followed in schools with regard to EWS children;

- To understand teachers' and principals' perspectives towards 25% reservation and their experiences in managing classrooms;
- To understand parental perceptions regarding their children studying in private schools;
- To identify strategies for effective implementation of 25% policy under RTE;
- To understand the changes in the strategies for inclusive practices.

### **Methodology**

The present paper is based on an empirical study of two public schools in Delhi. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of inclusion and negotiation over a period of time, the study was conducted in two phases. The idea behind conducting the study in a phased manner is that those children admitted to class 1 and 2 under the EWS category in 2013 had progressed to classes 3 and 4 in 2015-16. Thus, it becomes appropriate to examine how the schools managed to cope up with the strategies initiated previously and also to capture changes and improvements in inclusive practices. This also helped in understanding the extent to which schools acted as a catalyst in the process of inclusion of EWS students with the rest of the student population.

In the first phase of the study, fieldwork was conducted for about a month during September 2013. A total of 52 respondents were interviewed in both the schools with headmistress, school teachers, students, and parents. The researchers also had informal conversations with parents on many occasions. A revisit of the same schools for two weeks was done in the second phase in 2015-16 with the same set of teachers and headmistresses. Based on the objectives of the study, interview schedules and questionnaires were prepared. The schedules included School Principal Schedule, Teacher schedule, Student Schedule and Parent Schedule.

Interviews and observation were the main methods of data collection. Apart from these, few Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with teachers and parents. Researchers spent the whole day in the school to observe the school activities.

The co-operation received from the school authorities and good rapport with them immensely helped in data collection.

To protect the identity of the respondents and to maintain confidentiality, the names of the respondents are not used in the paper.

### **Understanding Social Inclusion**

Given the complexities of Indian society in general, and in Indian education in particular, a categorical definition of inclusion would render a myopic view of it as there are different interpretations to the term.

The move towards inclusion is not simply a technical or organizational change but also a movement with a clear philosophy. It is viewed as a process as well as as an approach. As a process, it involves addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO, 2005). Within the context of education, the process of inclusion involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners, involving restructuring of the culture, policies and practices in schools so that they can respond to the diversity of students in their classrooms. As an approach, inclusive education ensures not only the presence of all students in education in an inclusive classroom, but also assures their participation and achievement (Maheshwari and Shapurkar, 2015). Inclusion is therefore, not a category but a philosophy that goes around the following parameters (Bailey, 2005):

- *Spatial*: Inclusion relates to proximity and the closing of social and economic distances;
- *Relational*: It is defined in terms of a sense of belonging and social acceptance;
- *Functional*: It relates to the enhancement of knowledge, skills and understanding;  
and

- *Power*: It assumes a change in the locus of control. Thus in order to define the aspect of quality in inclusive education, it is pertinent to address all these concerns underpinning the said philosophy.

UNESCO views inclusion as “a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning” (2005:12). The principles of inclusion set out in various international declarations are used as a foundation. These are then interpreted and adapted to the context of individual countries (Ahuja, et al., 2005).

At the core of inclusive education is the human right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which states in article 26, “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (United Nations, 1948). Article 29 on the ‘Aims of education’, expresses that the educational development of the individual is the central aims and that education should allow children to reach their fullest potential in terms of cognitive, emotional and creative capacities (United Nations, 1989)

These international human rights treaties not only emphasized the prohibition but also stressed the active elimination of discrimination. A logical consequence of these rights was that all children should have the right to receive the kind of education that did not discriminate on any grounds such as caste, ethnicity, religion, economic status, refugee status, language, gender, disability etc. and that specific measures ought to be taken by the State to implement these rights in all learning environments.

Thus, inclusion is seen as a philosophy deriving out of right-based approach to education. A human rights-based approach is a bottom-up approach that considers needs and desires from the perspective of the child, with the ultimate aim of realizing his or

her rights. The approach is informed by the guiding principles of the Convention, which include non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child (Sandberg, 2014). A rights-based approach to education, therefore, captured three principles:

- Access to free and compulsory education.
- Equality, inclusion and non-discrimination.
- The right to quality education, content and processes.

Social inclusion remains one of the indispensable aspects of rights-based approach to education. Social inclusion is not just about the periphery versus the centre; it is about participating as a valued member of society (Freiler, 2001:2). Inclusion makes the link between the well being of children, our common humanity, and the social, economic, political and cultural conditions that must exist in a just and compassionate society. For her, social inclusion gets at the heart of what it means to be human: belonging, acceptance and recognition (ibid, 2001). It confronts, deals, and finally combats the ills emerging from the social stratification in classrooms.

School is an important agency of education. It acts as the caricature of a society. In order to make it flawless, attempts should be made to address and finally do away with the ills prevalent in the society. As a transforming nation, the onus rests heavily on education to make its youth not just competent but tolerant of others' existence as well. Schools, therefore, have a crucial role to play. For a school to be inclusive, the attitudes of everyone in the school, including administrators, teachers and other students should be positive towards all the students.

Social inclusion when merely approached as a philosophy can be incomplete. In reality, social inclusion means that all children, regardless of their family's economic status, are included in the mainstream. In the context of schools, students of all ability levels should be taught as equals and teachers must adjust their curriculum and teaching methodologies so that all students could benefit. Their participation in every aspect acts as a catalyst in promoting social inclusion. The present study attempts to examine the

same and tries to understand the role of school, teachers and parents in promoting social inclusion.

### **Profile of the Schools**

The two schools under study belonged to the reputed category of schools in Delhi. Both the schools were recognized by the Department of Education and were affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). They were co-educational, English medium schools that were functional from nursery to grade V. The two schools were unique as their junior schools were separate from the senior schools and served as feeder schools. This model had been a distinguishing feature which separated it from the rest of the schools. The schools followed the curriculum based on the guidelines given in the National Curriculum Framework 2005 by NCERT. They also adopted the system of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) as laid down by CBSE. Both the schools had state of the art infrastructure with AV room, well stocked library, sports equipment, pottery room etc.

School A was established in the year 1975 and had classes from nursery to class V. The Headmistress had been working in the school for the past 29 years. The broad vision of the school, as envisaged by the headmistress, was to impart values among the children, to find out their real qualities, and thereby, to work on the multiple intelligences of the children. The total student strength at the time of the study was 1468, out of which 763 were boys and 705 were girls. The teachers' strength was 87, out of which 02 were part time who teach French and German and the rest were working full time. Of the 85 full time teachers, 80 were females and the rest were males.

School B was established in 1983 and also held classes from Nursery to V. However, the nursery wing of the school was in a separate building close to the junior school. The Headmistress of the school had over two decades of teaching experience. Her strong ability to connect with young kids and her determination to strengthen their foundation brought her to the junior school. Her vision was to make the school a happy place for every kid. She also laid emphasis on 'learning by experience' and wanted her

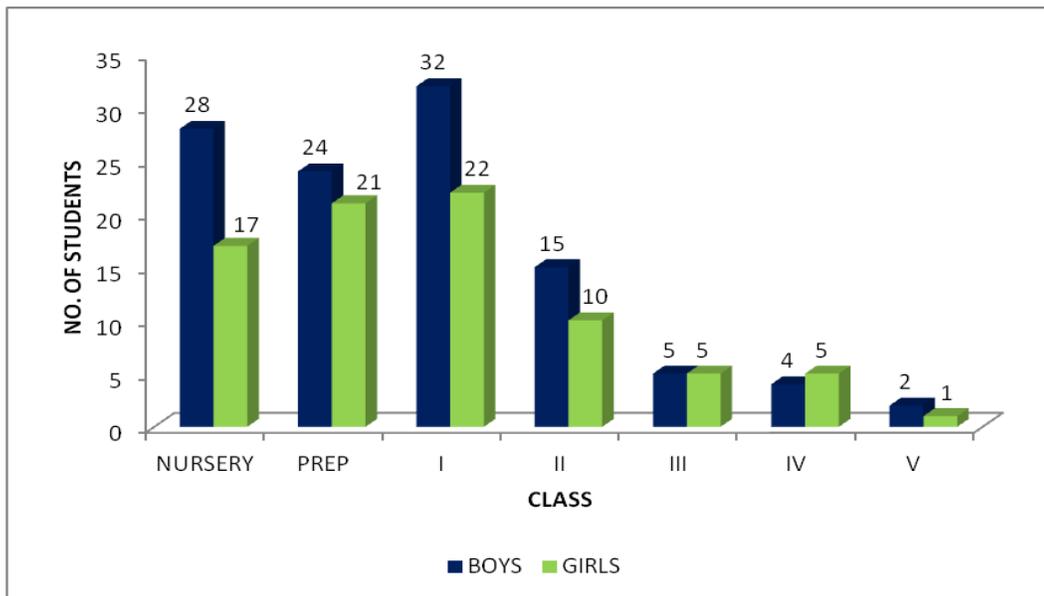
teaching staff to think out of the box. Apart from these, she made sure that she is accessible to parents all the time and saw that all their concerns were addressed.

In the year 2013-14, the student strength in this school was 1538, out of which 850 were boys and 688 were girls. The teachers’ strength was 94 out of which 08 teachers were temporary and the rest were regular teachers.

Both the schools implemented the twenty five percent reservation policy under RTE in the year 2010 from nursery class onwards. In school A, the total strength of EWS children in all the classes was 191 of which 110 were boys and 81 were girls. The class wise proportion of boys and girls in the academic year 2013-14 is given in the graph below:

FIGURE 1

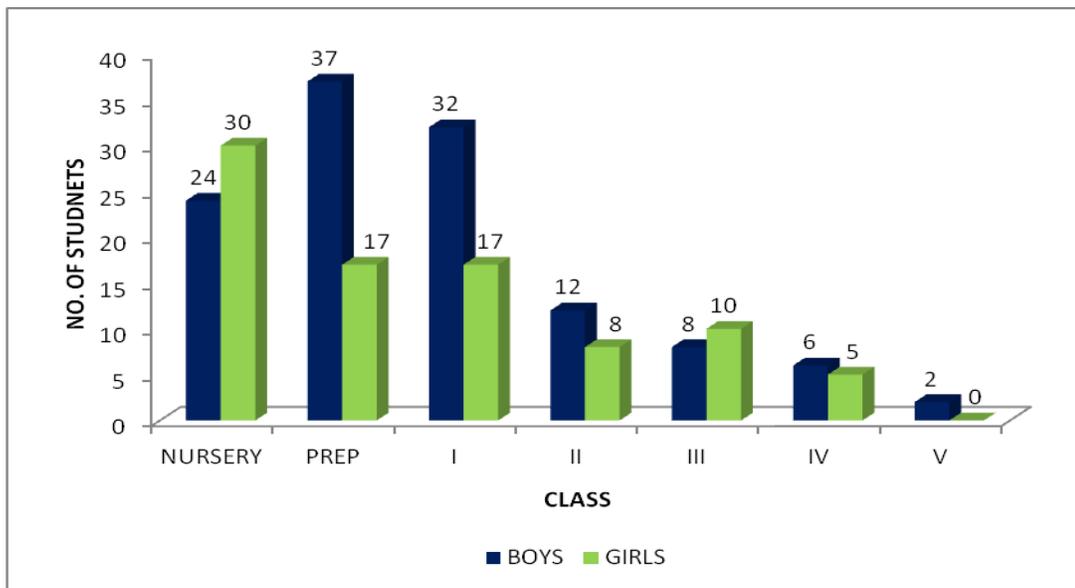
**Class wise enrolment of EWS Children in School A in the Academic Year 2013-14**



In School B, the total strength of EWS children stood at 208 with 121 boys and 87 girls. The class wise proportion of EWS boys and girls in the academic year 2013-14 is given below:

FIGURE 2

**Class wise enrolment of EWS children in School B in the academic year 2013-14**



**Implementation of the Act**

In the year 2013-14, admission procedure in both the schools was done keeping in mind the prescribed norms of RTE. For admitting EWS and disadvantaged students, the schools followed an open and transparent procedure as prescribed in the Act. They gave a standard application form to the parent which was also downloadable from the Education Department, Government of Delhi and schools’ websites.

Every application received was acknowledged through a receipt having registration number along with other details. All the filled applications were segregated as per the distance of residence from the school into four areas: Area A, B, C and D. Admissions of the children belonging to Economically Weaker Section and Disadvantaged Group Category is made on the following neighborhood criteria.

- Admission is first offered to eligible students belonging to ‘EWS and Disadvantaged’ Group residing within 1 KM of the specific school.
- In case the vacancies remain unfilled, students residing within 3 KM of the school are admitted.

- If there are still vacancies, then the admission is offered to other students residing within 6 KM of the institution.
- Students residing beyond 6 KM are admitted only in case vacancies remain unfilled even after considering all the students within 6 KM area.

The age limit for the children to be admitted at the entry level classes is as follows:

- For Nursery/Pre-School:- Between 3-4 years
- For KG/Pre-Primary:- Between 4-5 years
- For Class I: - Between 5-6 years.

Since the number of applications exceeded the available number of seats at entry level, an open lottery system is used to fill the seats as envisaged in the Act. Out of the total applications, lottery was drawn for all the valid applicants (those whose application form was complete in all respects including documentary proof). The date for the draw of lottery was informed to parents well in advance. The draw of lot was made in the presence of parents of the applicants and of a nominee of Education Department.

The first draw of lottery was conducted for the applications received in Area A. As the seats remained vacant, the draw was extended sequentially to areas B, C, and D. If the seats remained vacant even after the completion of nursery admissions, Education Department sent a list of EWS and disadvantaged students from which students were given admissions and this marked the closure of nursery admissions. Thus, as far as admissions were concerned, the school strictly followed all the guidelines laid down in the Act. With right to information (RTI), the schools were very careful and transparent in implementing the Act. With this procedure, the education department has brought changes in the admission procedure by directly inviting online applications.

An important component of RTE is to provide free education. As the right itself clearly defines 'Right of the children to free and compulsory education', it often implies

schools to waiver off tuition fee. However, tuition fee is only one component of the expenditure incurred towards education in private schools. Many other expenses not covered in tuition fee pose a financial burden on EWS parents. Thus, the Act enlarges the term 'free' by mandating that "no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education" (Government of India, 2009).

Abiding by it, both the schools did not charge any tuition fee from the EWS parents. Apart from this, the schools took initiative in easing out the financial burden on parents in many ways. Things like transportation, ID cards, almanac, books and copies were willingly offered by the schools for free to EWS children. However, these items were otherwise charged from students admitted under general category students. The major expenditure for the EWS parents was in purchasing the school textbooks and uniforms, which was a key concern.

The government gives Rs.500 for uniforms and Rs.125 for textbooks to EWS parents through schools. Nevertheless, as per the instructions given by the headmistress of both the schools, the book shops did their bit in keeping the stationery cost very nominal. Sometimes, the principals provided the stationery free of cost as and when need arose. Occasionally, parents from the general category donated the school uniforms and blazers and gave them to schools. The schools then got them properly dry-cleaned and asked EWS parents for their willingness to use it for their own kids, which the interested EWS parents took voluntarily. All this, in turn, eased the financial burden from EWS parents. These minor but critical initiatives by the school authorities made a lot of difference to the EWS parents and helped them to plan their expenditure on education accordingly.

Thus, as far as admissions were concerned, the school strictly followed all the guidelines laid down in the Act. However, the authorities were of the view that it was easier said than done. The schools had faced several challenges, be it in the first year when the Act was implemented or during the admissions or in the classrooms. The following section discusses the same in detail.

## **Challenges Encountered**

It is an undisputable fact that any change that is introduced in an already established system often gives rise to challenges, some foreseen and some unforeseen and the two schools were no exception to this. As per the RTE Act, it is mandatory for every private school to admit 25 percent of its students from the EWS and disadvantaged sections. Both the schools abided by it and started implementing this provision from nursery level in the year 2010. However, in the process, the schools had to confront many challenges, both at the management level and at the classroom level. The same is discussed in detail below.

### ***Challenges at the School Level***

During data collection, it was found that challenges faced by the school management were something which was not in their control, though they were very well aware of the fact that there were discrepancies. Most of the challenges revolved around the admission process and each challenge is discussed below:

- *Lack of authentic documents*

One of the major challenges which the schools encountered was to give admissions to genuine EWS and disadvantaged children. The Act defined *disadvantaged children* as ‘children from SC/ST, and other socially and educationally backward categories based on cultural, economic, social, geographical, linguistic, gender or other categories that the appropriate governments could separately notify’. The Act also defined children belonging to *weaker section* as ‘children belonging to such parent or guardian whose annual income was lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate government’.

When the schools sought application from the parents, the latter had to submit the form along with the following documentary proofs: date of birth certificate, residence address proof, income certificate, and caste certificate. The school authorities argued that the real EWS parents were sometimes left behind. It was found that some of the children who were admitted under this reservation were actually from financially stable

families and could easily afford the fees. However, they provided fake income or caste certificates in order to get their children enrolled under EWS category. This, in turn, was a major impediment for the deserving EWS parents and kept them away from the ambit. The school authorities pointed out that it was very difficult to check the veracity of such documents. In couple of instances, the schools came to know about the forgery of the documents, but it was not possible all the time. Specifically, verifying the income certificates was a major concern for the school authorities.

- *Lack of genuine contact details*

Getting the right contact details from the parents was also one of the major challenges for the school authorities. Many a times, the parents did not give their mobile numbers or they did not live in the residential address as recorded in the school register. In one instance, though one parent took admission under area A by giving the residence proof, it was later found out that the parent and his family were not staying there and he wanted the school bus to drop the child to the residence which was almost 20Km far from the school.

The school authorities also pointed out that when they called on the given contact details, the parents often did not respond. Thus, lack of proper means of communication with EWS parents was a major concern.

- *Addressing the concerns of two different sets of parents*

The key challenge of the school authorities, however, remained to negotiate with the EWS and general category parents. In a school when children from two different worlds enter, they may not have hierarchies in mind. However, it is the parents who tend to view one another from a socio-cultural lens. The attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions are manifestations of one's own social milieu.

They broadly classified EWS parents into two types: on one hand, there were parents who were very co-operative and came to school whenever they were called. On the other hand, there were parents who were very authoritative and felt that the entire responsibility lied in the hands of the school. Such parents did pose a lot of problems to

the school. They also reported that since more and more parents were becoming aware of the reservation, they took it as a right to get their child admitted in the school.

School authorities were of the view that at times parents from general category reflected a prejudiced mind-set and did not allow their children to interact with EWS children. Likewise, EWS parents restrained their interactions with general category parents due to the stark social distance. Materialistic culture and display of flamboyance further widened the gap between them.

### ***Challenges at the level of Classroom***

The teaching-learning discourse and the classroom management can be best understood by none other than the teachers. They constantly negotiate between general category and EWS children and in the process confront with many challenges. The first and foremost challenge pointed out by all the teachers was the communication problem of students from EWS. Teachers were of the view that since they had limited exposure to English at home, these children found it difficult to cope up with their general category peers who had an edge of English language being spoken at home. Teachers also felt that since the parents of EWS children were not educated and livelihood issues surpassed the rest, students lacked conducive atmosphere at home.

Another major challenge in the classroom was to strike a balance between general and EWS children as the class differences were very stark. They had apprehensions regarding the differences that crop up now and then in the classrooms that might have an impact on the child in the later years. In the words of one teacher, *‘Sometimes they feel left out when general students talk about holidays in abroad, birthday celebrations, parties, cars, houses, clothes etc.’* While another pointed out, *‘At times these children feel isolated when they are not able to contribute during peer group interactions due to a very different life style back home.’*

All this, in turn, resulted in less participation from these students in the classroom. Teachers reported that they tended to be withdrawn and hesitated from speaking openly.

### ***Challenges at the Student Level***

Apart from the challenges at the management and classroom level, the school authorities confronted challenges at the individual level of the students.

Some teachers reported that using abusive language, hitting, and bullying were the major issues among some of the EWS children. However, this could not be said categorically that only EWS children tend to fall for abusive language as some other teachers also reported that such language and behavioural issues also exist among general category students as well. Some teachers argued that since language spoken at school was different from language used at home, EWS students lacked self-confidence and were hesitant to speak with their peers. Teachers also felt that lack of adequate resources at home and experiencing the hardships of life made these small children much more matured than their age. Moreover, teachers reported that since luxury items continue to lure small children, they tended to draw comparisons of their lifestyle from their general category peers.

### **Schools' Responses and Strategies**

The myriad challenges discussed in the previous section when left unaddressed could have resulted in serious ramifications on the students and on the school as a whole. However, both the schools confronted these challenges and gradually, year by year, carved out strategies to overcome these challenges through introducing many inclusive practices in the schools. These strategies were not formulated overnight, but were the resultant of serious thought and deliberations with various stakeholders including teachers, co-ordinators, parents (both, EWS and non-EWS) as there was now a growing acceptance amongst them.

### ***Strategies at the School Level:***

The headmistresses in both the schools, with their strong commitment and determination, made sure that their schools were inclusive for all students irrespective of their caste and class. In order to do this, they introduced the following changes in the already existing school system:

- *Eliminating high-end celebrations*

Both the schools had institutionalized policy of doing away completely with the celebration of birthdays, teacher's day or any other function. The school authorities felt that if doing so, unintentionally children might end up drawing conclusions about each other's family status. This might have also impeded the process of inclusion. Therefore, children were not allowed to bring any gifts, chocolates, bouquets, or any other expensive items. However, to uphold the spirit of celebration, pocket-friendly toffees were allowed in school. The management of both the schools was of the view that the system was one for all children and hence there was no place for inequalities and segregation in the school.

This kind of strategy adopted by the schools helped to bring in harmony amongst the students irrespective of their socio-economic background.

- *Encouragement through co-scholastic activities*

Developing self-confidence amongst the EWS students was a major task. Since, they rarely received academic support at home, some of the students lagged behind. Apart from giving extra attention to them, their potential was channelized through sports and co-scholastic activities. The headmistresses encouraged motivational levels and developed self-confidence amongst them, particularly through sports and art. This strategy had been adopted to improve overall performance of EWS students.

Headmistresses were of view that children coming from EWS category showed diverse interest particularly in sports, as they were more energetic and had more stamina, but there was diversity among children coming from this section, because few of them were performing at par with general children and sometimes even better than them.

- *Regulation of stationery*

An important strategy was that of regulation of the stationery. Students were introduced to pens in class V so that they are able to adjust easily with the writing style the moment they go to parent branch. All students were instructed to write with only a particular pen, costing nominally. It is noticed that general category parents gave fancy

and expensive stationery to their children. They were discouraged as it might create differences among the children.

- *Common gear for celebrations*

No fancy dress for annual day celebrations were allowed. Designs of different characters during annual day celebrations were cut out from cardboard. The usability of the costume in the long run was considered. Refraining from celebrating school annual functions with extravaganza was an important step so that all the parents can actively participate in it.

- *Restriction on pocket-money*

Schools also strictly instructed the general category parents to not give money to their children. For emergency purposes, the headmistress and teachers provided a ready help. Since the schools closed their canteens, children were not required to carry any money.

- *Favoring role-modelling*

Students were applauded in the morning assembly in front of everyone so that others too drew inspiration from them. This encouraged the motivational levels of EWS kids greatly and gave them a feeling that even they can be a role model for others.

- *Student sensitization*

To facilitate the process of inclusion, school authorities constantly kept sensitizing students towards each other's needs and values and onus was laid on empathy building and appreciating one's individuality.

- *Remedial support systems*

In one school, Centre of Civil Society (an NGO) under the CSR program of Tech Mahindra, had been conducting classes for weaker students under the programme 'PATANG' for the past two years. This programme catered to the need of those children who were lagging behind in studies, including general category children. A large number of EWS children had benefited from the programme. The idea behind the programme was to wean the children away from the under-qualified tutors. There were

special educators and counselors for EWS children. School also conducted smart classes for academically weak children who included EWS as well as general category.

- *Regular orientation of EWS parents*

EWS Parents were generally unable to focus much on their children's studies, as most of the parents were working. Given this situation, the schools were sensitive towards the EWS families. Hence, to give suggestions on improvement on the academic aspect, they started interacting with the EWS parents more often and called them time to time to discuss the child's progress. At times, the instructions were written in Hindi in order to make the parents understand.

**Student's Aspirations to Achieve**

Recalling one incident, the headmistress of school B reported that a EWS child in grade IV stole the answer sheets of class topper and wrote his name on it and replaced it with the answer sheet of his own. He also stole the geometry box of another student. When his parents came to school to return the box, they were briefed about stealing of answer sheets. Interpretation of this particular incident by the headmistress was quite encouraging as she explained this incident as peer pressure. Stealing of the answer-books of the topper of the class showed the aspiration to achieve the highest marks, which some of the EWS children found difficult to achieve because of the lack of academic support system at home.

The school authorities also invested time and energy in counselling them regarding their involvement in their child's education. They reported that initially EWS parents never used to attend PTA meetings. Only after counselling and building self confidence in them, they started coming. The EWS parents were congratulated on the occasions when their children performed well or achieved something. This, in turn, gave lot of transparency where EWS parents could actually see what was happening in the school and classrooms. Orientation session of the parents of EWS children were also held on a regular basis regarding behavior of their children.

From these instances, it was quite clear that the role and responsibility of the school in dealing with behavioural modification and counselling was undeniable. The atmosphere at home and lack of adequate resources were issues pointed out by most of the teachers. Both the school teachers and headmistresses claimed that there was no

discrimination between EWS children and the general category children. The schools tried their best not to discriminate or segregate students. For the authorities, once the child was admitted to their school, the child became ‘their’ student and they had to build a strong moral foundation in them. They aimed to provide a healthy and stress free learning environment to all the children.

### ***Strategies Implemented by the Teachers in Classrooms***

Apart from bringing changes in the school system, teachers played a pivotal role in creating a conducive atmosphere in the classrooms. Some of their attempts towards inclusive practices are as follows:

- *Change in teaching-learning methodology*

One very encouraging aspect to facilitate better learning was adoption of inclusive pedagogy. The teachers in both the schools were found using contextual and appropriate examples and questions. For example, instead of asking ‘which place did you visit during summer vacation?’ they asked ‘whom did you visit during your summer vacation?’ because most of the children from EWS could not afford holidaying abroad. Similarly, instead of asking ‘which room do you like the most in your house?’ they asked ‘which place do you like the most in your house?’ as most of the EWS children lived in single house accommodation.

- *Adoption of bilingual teaching*

The major challenge faced by teachers in teaching EWS children was the language barrier. To combat this, they opted for bilingual teaching accompanied with a lot of gestures while giving instruction. Repetition of words and sentences assumed prime importance in the classroom to reinforce instructions.

- *Remedial measures*

They also gave individual time and attention to those who lagged behind, irrespective of whether the child belonged to EWS or from general category. Those children who did not do well in the regular class were sent to remedial classes in order to make their foundations strong. There was also the concept of ‘zero’ period where the

class was addressed to revision owing to difficulty areas. The students were addressed in totality, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

- *Eliminating the use of expensive stationery*

The teachers in the classroom discouraged students from bringing expensive stationery and display of flamboyance. Percolation of materialism was something which was prevented in the school.

- *Changing the seating arrangement*

Teachers ensured that there was no group formation within the class and made sure that there was healthy classroom atmosphere. For this purpose, there was the concept of seat rotation in classes. Through weekly random sitting arrangement, EWS students were made to sit next to the general category students and they all changed their seats by rotation. It gave an opportunity of interaction amongst all students, and every child got to sit in front row.

- *Positive reinforcement through initiation of leadership skills*

Teachers encouraged equal participation from all the students and provided equal opportunities in all the activities to inculcate leadership quality. They gave positive reinforcements to EWS children whenever they excelled in anything. This, in turn, resulted in increased self-esteem and confidence among EWS children.

- *Provision of reference material*

Extra textbooks and teaching-learning materials were provided to the students who belonged to EWS quota. However, they were not just restricted to them but non-EWS students with inquisitive approach were also welcomed.

### **Perceptions of the School Personnel**

Any research study remains incomplete without understanding the perceptions of the people for whom any Act or Policy is meant for. In the present context, data collected through informal conversations and interviewing the respondents in their natural settings not only helped in getting different perspectives, but also facilitated in

understanding the subtleties and tacit components. The voices of headmistresses and teachers, particularly, are instrumental in understanding their perspective of integration as they are the ones who constantly negotiate with EWS and general category students in the school and classrooms.

The management of both the schools was of the view that the system was one for all children, and hence, there was no place for inequalities and segregation in the school. Head mistresses of both the schools felt that children coming from EWS category are showing diverse interests, particularly in sports, as they are more energetic and have more stamina, but there was diversity among children coming from this section, because few of them were performing at par with general children and sometimes even better than them. Both were very optimistic and reasoned that they derive satisfaction by providing quality education to these children. The same perspective was also reiterated by the teachers. In the words of one teacher:

*Having children from the disadvantaged groups teaches the general children to respect people from lower socio-economic strata. They learn to value money and be kind and caring for these disadvantaged children.*

The teachers were conscious not to address any child as EWS category so as to discourage any sort of discrimination amongst the students. The teachers stated that the EWS students were quick learners but expression often became a challenge. They noted that academically these students didn't need a lot of extra attention and were regarded as any other student of the classroom. In classes IV and V, the teachers described the EWS students as bright, hardworking and with 'zeal to excel'. However, as compared to the General Category students, the EWS ones needed more follow up in terms of their academic progress.

According to teachers, EWS students do well in co-scholastic activities, especially in sports. They were active and had more stamina than general category students. Thus, they were very experimental with physical pursuits. On the whole, they described them as curious, and friendly kids. One teacher mentioned that if there was any discrimination seen, it was more from the side of the parents. The teachers and

headmistresses firmly believed that there was no deficiency in the caliber of EWS children. It was just that they needed extra assistance to follow up what was being taught at the school. A very positive aspect of the admission of EWS children was zero drop-out rate. The headmistress was quoted as saying:

*It is a good beginning, but challenges will come in future. We need dedicated and committed teachers for them, who will provide additional effort for these children. First thing is believing in a cause and then implementing it with passion. Staff support is very important.*

At one level, the teachers expressed empathy and positive attitude towards EWS children. At the same time, a few teachers came up with apprehensions that 25% EWS quota system had diluted the original potential of the school. One of them stated:

*The pedagogy and use of bilingual teaching for the inclusion of the EWS children has affected the potential of other students*

Few teachers also mentioned about the difficulties they face in the classrooms. For instance, teachers reported that in the initial days, the EWS children were not very receptive and remained quiet in the class. In the words of one teacher:

*The children who come from economically weaker sections seem less confident initially to come to an environment new to them. The first few steps for them are a combination of confused thinking, doubts and lack of belief. But we have seen out of experience that these things magically disappear in a very short period of time*

They also had apprehensions regarding the differences that crop up now and then in the classrooms that might have an impact on the child in the later years. One teacher says:

*At times, acceptance is an issue and they do tend to get ignored by their peers. They internalise and compare themselves with others especially by way of material benefits. They make these demands which when not satisfied at home leads to frustration.*

When asked about the major differences they find between EWS and general category students, teachers pointed out the following reasons:

- Environment in which they were living
- Level of education among parents
- Lack of facilities at disposal
- Confidence levels
- Cleanliness and hygiene

Further during the discussions with them, instances of EWS children using abusive language and displaying aggressive behavior was reported. However, this did not typify EWS children only as even the students from general category were prone to using such language. School counselors counselled such children and the parents were suggested to keep the environment at home free from abuse and violence.

Many teachers informed that not all children were weak in their learning levels. Some of them had linguistic IQ along with grasping power and behaved in a good manner. Some had good handwriting in class and completed their homework on time. Teachers reported that wherever there was no language issue, EWS children really perform well. They were very good in crafts, sports and had very good motor skills.

### **Understanding Childrens' Perspectives**

When interviewing EWS children, almost all of them admitted to like the school and their classmates. They admitted of getting reprimands when they are mischievous in the class. The language of communication among the students was found to be Hindi whereas with teachers they make every attempt to speak in English.

While the children in the Prep classes were found to be shy and showed non-verbal signs of communication; in class 2, with improved language development, they indulged into communication but the medium of instruction was predominantly Hindi. The children were found to be confident giving detailed account of their families and also informed hardly helped them in their studies and that they were on their own.

On interaction with the students from Classes IV and V, it was clear that their confidence level was greater than the younger students. Their communication level in English was quite fluent and vocabulary was also very good. Even when they were asked to talk about their families, they stated whether they belonged to nuclear or joint. When asked a question in Hindi, one student purposefully responded back in English, showing a good comfort level with the language. Their confidence level was also reflected from the fact that one EWS girl went on to give a feedback on her academic performance and was conscious that she needed to work harder on her English skills.

### **Zeal to learn and excel**

A case of two EWS girls came up during interactions who were working hard on their communicative competence. It was informed that they were neighbors and also best friends and thus, studied together. One of the girl's elder brother or grandfather at times helped them in academics. The two families have pooled in for Tata Sky Dish TV's Active English Program and that the expenses were borne jointly by the parents.

Such instances show that EWS parents are very optimistic towards education and see it as a catalyst for socio-economic mobility.

During the field work, several questions were addressed to them about their likes, dislikes, eating habits, sports and general interests, to which students cheerfully answered. It emerged that each of the 'best friend group' had a EWS child, who was appreciated by all in the class. Hence, students did not show any variation in their behavior due to any child. Age-specific issues such as same-sex segregation, i.e. boys with boys and girls with girls was a commonly observed issue. On being asked about the friends, the EWS children pointed to each other but said they were closer to the other students as well (general-category ones). This reflected a great sense of friendship between the students. However, when asked whom they meet post school hours, EWS children pointed towards each other and not towards the general category students. Regarding academics, almost all the students seemed very bright and ambitious. They even mentioned the various career paths they wanted to follow.

When interviewing children, almost all of them admitted to like the school and their classmates. They admitted of getting reprimands when they were mischievous in

the class. Though children belonging to EWS category might not be as good in English or on equal footage to regular students in terms of comprehension or speaking, they did not face much difficulty in understanding. Almost all the EWS category students seemed to be working hard to come at par with their classmates.

It was found that EWS children did go to private tuitions in the evening. Teachers informed that it has not improved the situation, as teaching method of private tutors was totally different from the method used at school. According to few teachers, these private tutors were following rote learning, which in turn, was creating problem for teachers in school. Thus, the problem was with those who were going to tuitions, not with those who were studying at home. They learned different methods at tuitions which were totally different from classroom learning. Thus, child ended up getting confused regarding which method to adopt.

Resultantly, the students and the teachers, alike faced a lot of difficulty in teaching-learning at the school. It should be understood that at this crucial age, concept building was very sensitive and important. Learning and conditioning of a wrong concept could disrupt the further advancement in knowledge acquisition by the child. This created a serious issue not only for the concerned EWS student, who received improper private tuitions but also for the entire class including the teachers. A serious concern of learning of wrong concepts by the EWS emerged on the discussion with the teachers, as it was evident in their notebooks as well. The teachers took extra initiative of correcting these notebooks and sending across to these under-qualified tutors. This dependence on neighborhood private tutors on the academic support of the children, had a serious implication on the learning of the child and detrimental for the teachers to manage these students in the classrooms. Some teachers reported that wherever there is parental monitoring of private tutors, children did well. On the other hand, when parents leave the child entirely to the tutor, the child is not performing well.

However, there were cases where EWS kids outdid their fellow general colleagues and represented the school in Olympiads, recitations, and art competitions. When asked, they reported that they just wanted to learn and know more. The sheer

inquisitive thought of knowledge acquisition was the intrinsic force that worked for their development. When asked about their best friend in class or with whom they played or shared their food, they took the names of some of their classmates who belonged to general category. In one case, a child when asked whether she shared her lunch with others or not, responded in denial stating that she feels shy as she brings only *paranthas* whereas others bring expensive and imported food items.

Apart from academics, children excelled in different spheres like drawing, handwriting, dancing etc. They expressed their interest in co-curricular and sports activities. They took part in dance and arts and showed eagerness in such programmes. One child, as per the class teacher, was the best dancer in such class, though she lagged behind in studies. Teachers reported that they also had very good motor skills.

Overall, it could be said that children were more comfortable with each other and were not aware of anything about the marked divisions of society such as rich or poor. Almost all the EWS students had friends from the general category children. Even during the lunchtime, it was very hard to distinguish the EWS students from the general category students. All the students were actively interacting with one another and were seen sharing food. On the whole, they expressed their happiness with the school and the teaching. Students interacted with each other harmoniously and there was no prejudice visible at early stage of the child's schooling. As aptly pointed out by one of the teachers:

*Physically, emotionally, and temperamentally, all children are the same. Little joys that make them smile are the same. They enjoy the same activities, projects and excursions. Moments of sorrow and disappointments are caused by similar reasons. Difference lies only in the environment they are born and brought in.*

### **Perspectives of the Parents**

The two sets of parents inhabited two different worlds and accordingly perceived the reality. The manifestations were visible through their communication, dressing pattern, demeanour, mannerisms etc. While one set of parents had all the resources at

their disposal, sometimes even in excess, the other set of parents struggled hard to make their ends meet with their meagre resources. Nevertheless, there was one thing common in both sets of parents. They both wanted the best education for their child and in this regard, EWS parents did not mind going out of their way to keep up with their child's aspirations.

- *Emergent viewpoints*

During interviews with the general category parents, it was found that within them there were two contrasting viewpoints: one in favour of reservation and the other against it. Those who favoured it reported that this gave a chance to their children to mingle with the disadvantaged ones and come to know about the world of EWS children. On the other hand, those against this quota argued that the rearing patterns were very different in these two sets of children. Moreover, they felt that those general category students who did really well were on the losing side as they could have done much better and learned many things when they were in a class of students with same IQ levels. They also complained that EWS children have lot of behavioural problems like biting, hitting and bullying others. Thus, the parents were not very comfortable and felt that government should think of some other alternatives.

Nevertheless, there had been instances when general category parents came forward and donated uniforms, textbooks and other stationary. An incident worth mentioning was that of a EWS child in class V whose hand got fractured during school hours. The treatment could have been a financial burden for the parents. In view of this, general category parents pooled up money and paid for his entire treatment. The HM also took lot of care and attention during his stay in the hospital. The parents of this particular boy felt grateful to the school and the parents for coming forward at the time of crisis. Moreover, there was also one parent from general category who volunteered to give remedial teaching to EWS children.

EWS parents, on the other hand, considered it as their good fortune that their children are studying in such schools. They placed high importance on education and viewed it as a means to climb up the economic ladder. A parent, who by occupation was

a washer man, stated '*Dhobi ka bacha hai toh kya hua, shiksha sabko milini chahiye aur bahut zaroori bhi hai.*' (So what if he is the son of a washer man, each child deserves good education and it is extremely important as well).

- *Child's education - a matter of status symbol*

Parents also considered it as their status symbol that their children were studying in high-end private schools. The HM reported that when she asked with whom the children played in the evening, parents reply, 'Our children play only with model school children, not with any other children'. Similarly, some of the EWS parents did not respond to the feedback provided by the schools to improve the performance of their children as one of the EWS parent of a less achiever said, '*humara bacha ABC school ki uniform mein school jata hai, bas yahi dekh kar kaleje ko thandak milti hai. Uske seekhne se kuch lena dena nhi*' ('Our child goes in ABC uniform, this cools our bosom! We are not bothered about what he learns at school'). Through this, it could be inferred that the education of one's child can severely have its implications on the socio-economic status of their children.

- *Combating the disparities*

Most of the parents considered the 25% quota as effective and useful through which they got their children admitted to such reputed schools. Parents also believed that teachers did not discriminate their children from others and gave proper attention to all. During FGDs with parents, it was revealed that they did not interact much with general category parents as they felt shy and hesitant. They came to school only to meet teachers and reported that all teachers were supportive. Few parents admitted that they felt shy and hesitant to interact with parents of other children.

Unanimously, everyone reported that they have not felt any kind of discrimination in the school. A parent, who works as a security guard, informed that his child was earlier studying in another school but there the school authorities used to make EWS children sit separately and used to conduct classes separately. In his words, '*Wahan mahaul hamein acha nahin laga. Unhone humse writing mein le liya ki fees ke alava sub kuch charge hoga. Par yahan aisa kuch nahin hain.*' (We did not like the

environment there. They took in writing from us that barring fee charges, all other expenses shall have a bearing).

However, in one of the instances, it was reported by headmistress of one of the schools that one EWS parent wrote an anonymous letter in Hindi which informed them about the socialization realized by general category parents by way of having lunch together or celebrating birthday parties and not inviting EWS parents which the parent viewed as a sort of discrimination. The letter also stated that if the school did not take appropriate action, the parent will resort to complain to the media. The principal had to intervene and called a meeting with the parents and made them understand that personal socialization is beyond the control of the school and moreover, since this was happening after school hours, schools had little role to play.

- *Child's education vs. household expenditure*

All the parents reported that in the beginning of the academic year, they spent approximately five thousand rupees on books, uniforms, stationary and other materials. Since majority of them stayed in a rented house and sent their children to tuitions, they felt that in the beginning of the academic year they had to plan their household expenditure in order to adjust with the school related expenditure.

It is pertinent to highlight here that EWS parents are under constant pressure to match with general category parents in terms of buying material things. They reported that their kids demanded fancy stationary when they see their friends having fancy items. This is one of reasons parents cited for not going to birthday parties of general category children. They also started sending '*frooties*', chips and other similar things so that their children did not feel left out.

Nevertheless, everyone was highly satisfied with the school and unanimously reported that they would like to continue their child in the same school till the child completes the senior school.

- *All-round education and development*

They also wanted their child to excel sports and in activities beyond academics, thus looking at holistic development of their child. One EWS parent even mentioned that he specially pooled in money to ensure their child joins a cricket academy.

### **Classroom Observations**

Classrooms are not just physical spaces, but are important arena where students spend most of their time. This is the place where knowledge is acquired, relationships are built and several qualities are developed. In the present study, classroom observations proved very vital in understanding the EWS children and their participation in the class.

Children at tender age do not have hierarchies or differences in their minds. The same was found to be true during classroom observations. EWS children sat with other children and there were healthy interactions. Each class in the nursery and prep had two teachers who took care of all the children.

While responding to teacher's questions, some EWS children did very well and in fact better than general category children. When the nursery children were asked about their name, class etc., they felt hesitant to answer in English and preferred to answer in Hindi.

On the contrary, when the same questions were posed to class I EWS children, some of them responded in English. This reveals that students admitted right from the nursery had an edge over those who are admitted directly into a class. In one of the classroom observation, the teacher took Hindi dictation test. When the copies of EWS children were randomly checked it was observed that some of them committed small mistakes, though they had idea about the words. However, most of the general children wrote words correctly and neatly. Thus, EWS children faced the issue of clarity and needed further attention.

During informal conversations, it was observed that one boy of EWS category sat with a girl from general category. The girl said that he is good in Hindi so he helps her

in the subject and in turn, she helps him in English. Thus, there was neither segregation at the school level, nor such differences exist among the children.

### **Intimate Family Ties**

The family as a closely knit unit was very strong among EWS students and parents. They were brought up in an atmosphere where giving and sharing is the value imparted right from the childhood. For instance, it was observed that in one of the schools, birthday celebration was going on and the birthday girl, who belonged to a general category, was distributing one chocolate each to all her classmates. While doing this, one EWS girl was asking for two chocolates. The teacher patiently made her understand that there was only one chocolate for every child in the classroom. The girl obediently listened to her teacher and sat down in her place. Later, when the little girl was asked why she asked for two chocolates, she responded that she wanted to give it to her siblings. Thus, sibling care and sharing amongst the family members was a common feature among the EWS children.

It is pertinent to highlight that the environment in which the EWS children live, plays an important role as this is the world they experience and confront regularly. They brought the same experience in the classroom and the role of the teacher at this juncture becomes very crucial in appreciating and making other children to understand as well.

In one classroom observation, the teacher was teaching 'styles of cooking'. When she asking what are the different styles of cooking, students replied in chorus 'frying, baking, grilling, roasting'. This response came from general category students, but it was very clear from the expressions of the few EWS children sitting in the class that they were unable to comprehend as they might not have seen baking and grilling in their house. Teacher then continued, 'Give me one example of deep frying.' The difference arose at this point, where the students responded, 'French fries (general category) and 'Pooris' (EWS students). At this juncture, it is significant to underscore here that the example of food items given by the two different sets of students does not typify the class structure existing in the classroom. However, it is argued that the EWS children could easily relate to deep frying as they might have seen it at home and their responses in the classroom are directly related to the experiences of students in the worlds they inhabit.

This is further substantiated from another class room observation where the teacher was teaching fractions. The introduction of the lecture was crisp. The students were asked to pay attention to the question being written. Question was framed on slicing of a 'pizza'. The teacher adopted the question-answer methodology. However, when asked, not all students gave an agreeable nod on having tasted a pizza. The students saying 'no' were mostly those from EWS background and few belonged to general category as well. The teacher was adept in explaining the concept of a 'pizza', a luxurious item otherwise, in terms of a '*chapati* pizza', so that all of them could relate to it. Since students, irrespective of their social class, were very familiar to this example, all of them actively participated in the class.

Such inclusive teaching methodologies not only promotes participation from the EWS students, but eventually helps in building their confidence levels. Thus, it is very important for the teachers to draw examples from the culturally rich world of EWS children so that the latter can easily relate to it and comprehend well.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The divide in the Indian education system with high fee private schools catering to the elites and government schools for the poor widened due to increasing number of private schools in the last few decades. When viewed from a broader perspective, this resulted in exclusion and limited psycho-social development of the child. To bridge this gap, 25% reservation for the EWS and disadvantaged group in private schools was a welcome change. As a part of social obligation, private schools were supposed to take this provision in the right spirit. It is an undeniable fact that change could not be brought overnight with this provision, especially in a system which had been catering to one particular economic class for decades. In such a scenario, setbacks and pitfalls were unavoidable, but addressing them and finding out strategies to overcome formed the foundations of a successful organizational leadership. In this context, the present study was a reflection on the status of the implementation of the strategies adopted by the schools to address the issue of inclusion of the EWS in its classrooms to facilitate effective teaching-learning. After having conducted a study three years ago, the then

students of class 1 had reached class 3 and they were observed during classroom transactions. The study looked forward to trace the steady development of EWS students as they moved ahead in higher classes.

The study shows that there were deliberate attempts made by the headmistress and class teachers to promote a congenial and favorable environment for social inclusion. One of the significant aspects is that in both the schools, EWS children were spread in all the sections in equal number and no discrimination was made in their sitting arrangement as they rotate their seats. Generally, slow learners were made to sit with other children to facilitate learning. The students' involvement in co-scholastic activities were channelized if they were not too keen towards academics.

Both the schools had clear policies to integrate and achieve inclusion from the time of joining the school. Both the schools adopted specific strategies and also institutionalized practices for adapting pedagogical and bilingual methods to help EWS children to overcome any constraints.

Teachers, through their bilingual instruction and individual attention to every student, made the classroom atmosphere very friendly and stress-free. Though both the schools maintained detailed student profiles, in one of the schools it was found to be more comprehensive. Teachers in this school maintain student profiles which included every student's behavioural profile, family profile and medical profile.

As far as interactions between EWS and general category parents was concerned, it was found to be very limited. There were instances when parents of both types grumbled with issues related to inclusion. However, economic inequality was something which the schools could not bridge. The dynamics after the school hours among the parents and among the students was also beyond the control of school. Nonetheless, the schools made sure that as long as the students were in the school, they were happy, productive and diligent.

Since the academic progress of their children in schools remained a constant concern, EWS parents were found to be prompt in providing the academic support

through private tutoring. They placed a lot of value on education and were very optimistic towards it. Their responsiveness and cooperation for the academic aspect heavily rested upon the need for their children to improve. They all reasoned that they wanted their children to prosper, which is why they did not mind spending extra money for it. They were highly motivated, sent children to private tuitions, had high aspirations and consider schooling in these schools as a privilege.

It was found that though EWS children were less interactive in the class, they did pay good attention to their studies and even came up on their own to clear their doubts with their teacher. The EWS students of the IVth and Vth grade were more confident in the classroom and more engaged in the classroom activities as compared to the younger EWS students.

It is important to highlight that the genuine EWS parents were out of the reach. However, schools had no control over the validity of income and caste certificates produced by EWS parents. There were anecdotes that EWS children come in chauffeur driven cars, some children dropped and picked up by taxis, and some have flourishing businesses. However, these issues were beyond the schools' purview. Moreover, those who took admission under socially disadvantaged were economically well off and did not like to identify themselves with EWS parents. Thus, the schools were not catering to the poorest of the poor parents and the parental background revealed that they were not completely marginalized or disadvantaged as none of them were slum dwellers or illiterates. These children and their siblings had exposure to private schools. They would have gone to some other private school depending on their affordability as some of them were studying in private schools before joining.

On the whole, both the schools implemented the provision in true spirit. The leadership of the HMs played a pivotal role in the successful implementation. Their conscious efforts to orient the parents and teachers in integrating the EWS children had found to be effective. Both the headmistresses' and class teachers' showed sensitivity in dealing with EWS students and parents.

Undoubtedly, social inclusion is a long process and cannot be achieved overnight. However, both the schools under study have managed to do every bit to make the school a happy place, irrespective of the child's social and economic background.

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