

**THE DISCOURSE OF EDUCATION:
RE-EXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF INCLUSION VIA A STUDY
OF THE NARRATIVES OF SCHOOLCHILDREN AND THE
INDIAN STATE**

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Discourse of Education: Re-Examining the Concept of Inclusion Via a Study of the Narratives of School Children and the Indian State**” being submitted by Ms. Annie Mathew for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, to the **Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi** is a record of original bona-fide research carried out by her under my guidance and supervision. I am satisfied that the thesis presented by Ms. Annie Mathew is worthy of consideration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The results of this thesis have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for award of degree or diploma.

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I am where I started, with the humbling knowledge that there is so much to learn, to understand.

We shall not cease from exploration.

And the end of all our exploring.

Will be to arrive where we started.

And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

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ABSTRACT

Definitions and understandings of disability, educational inclusion, and issues of pedagogic power and control comprise the principal subject matter of this thesis. The thesis traces the evolving definition of disability from the Indian Census of 1872 to the 'Persons with Disability Act' of 1995. It links the literature on disability to issues of inclusion in education by first considering the definition of inclusion in the 1974 'Integrated Education for Disabled Children' scheme (IEDC) and then mapping its changing ideological contours in India as well as globally from the 'medical' model to a 'rights-based' paradigm. More recent initiatives undertaken by the government such as the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan', 2000, the 'National Curriculum Framework', 2005 and the 'Right to Education' Act, 2009 and the specific recommendations made by these commissions in the area of disability and inclusion are also examined in order to bring into focus the contemporary and contextual relevance of this large set of overarching official documents as well as the 'public interest litigations' (PILS) filed in response to them.

Narrative analysis was the method employed to explore these concerns in the Indian educational context. In the initial phase of the research, the empirical data revealed a composite 'grand narrative' (Lyotard, 1979) of education that seemed to emerge from a reading of the documents at hand. Specifically, Labov's sociolinguistic theory of narrative (1974), Toolan's deployment of the ideas of mode, tenor and field as applied in narratology (1988) and Nair's theory of context, tacit knowledge and 'impliculture' in the 'co-authored' production of complex narratives (2002, 2011) were utilized in order to bring coherence and subtlety to the analysis of the data collected and to provide a nuanced understanding of India's educational policy. Bernstein's pioneering work (1996) on the sociology of classroom discourse and the

relationship between culture and development, which maintains that “the focus of power is on relations between groups and it is through [these] relations that power exercises control” was also of critical import in understanding how the Indian state’s narratives on 'disability' and 'inclusion' influence the culture of the school classroom.

Theories such as Bernstein's indicate that attitudes are often crystallized at a young age through social interactions and that inclusion positively impacts intergenerational communication of attitudes. This thesis thus pays close attention to the perspectives and attitudes of the end-users of the state's policies, namely, the teachers and children in the classroom. Of particular interest in this connection is a longitudinal study undertaken in the thesis of a set of sixty of visual and verbally transcribed narratives by young children conducted over a period of three years in an inclusive school in New Delhi, India. Typical children as well as children classified as ‘challenged’ here told stories about how they perceived their futures and saw their relationship with their teachers, families and peers. Based on these 'little narratives' as well as the larger narrative of state policy, the thesis further underscores the insight that narrative constitutes a natural resource for engagement. The 'story-telling' form seemed precisely to enable children to explore their needs, wants, wishes, desires and hopes without being unduly inhibited by the constraints of a classroom environment. Focusing on the narrative intersection between state, policy, teacher and student, this exploratory study of inclusion in the arena of education thus shows how a composite, multi-layered 'national' narrative is continually formed and informed by changing social attitudes and aspirations.

Key Words: challenged, children, cultural context, discourse, education, inclusion, narrative, special needs, state policy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certificate	i
Acknowledgements	ii-iii
Abstract	iv-v
List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
List of Appendices	xii
Glossary	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1-32
1.1 Inclusion	2
1.1.1 Popular Understanding of Inclusion	3
1.1.2 Legal Standing of Inclusion	5
1.1.3 Government Initiatives	7
1.2 The Grand Narrative	9
1.3 The Present Study	10
1.3.1 Power, Control and Disability	11
1.3.2 The Perception of Disability by the State	12
1.3.3 Definitions of Disability	16
1.3.4 Different Models of Disability	20
1.4 Education and Disability	23
1.4.1 Disability Constructs in Classroom	25
1.5 Theoretical Paradigm	30
1.5.1 Labov	30

1.5.2	Bernstein	31
1.5.3	Nair	34
1.5.4	Toolan	36
1.6	Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS		33-52
2.1	Introduction	33
2.2	Data	40
2.2.1	Written Narratives	42
2.2.2	Oral Narratives	44
2.2.3	Visual Narratives	46
2.2.4	Sample Size	47
2.2.5	Temporal Quality of Data	48
2.3	Inclusion Criteria	48
2.3.1	Matching Tale and Teller	48
2.3.2	Participant Observation	49
2.4	Measurement	50
2.5	Hypotheses	51
2.6	Conclusion	52
CHAPTER 3: THE STATE SPEAKS: ABSTRACT AND ORIENTATION		53-85
3.1	Description of the Data: State Documents and the NCF-2005	54
3.2	Analysis	57
3.2.1	Labov	57
3.2.2	Bernstein	66
3.2.3	Nair	71

3.2.4 Toolan	82
3.3 Conclusion	85
CHAPTER 4: THE PEOPLE RESPOND: COMPLICATING ACTION AND EVALUATION	86-109
4.1 Description of the Data	87
4.2 Analysis	90
4.2.1 Public Interest Litigation	90
4.2.2 Teacher's Narratives	101
4.3 Conclusion	109
CHAPTER 5: CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES: EVALUATION RESOLUTION AND CODA	110-150
5.1 Description of the Narratives of Children	110
5.1.1 Older Children's Oral Narratives	111
5.2 Labov	117
5.2.1 The Oral Narratives	117
5.2.2 Visual Narratives	118
5.3 Nair and Bernstein	119
5.3.1 Oral Narratives of Older Children	119
5.3.2 Visual Narratives	124
5.4 Multilingual Environment	147
5.5 Restricted and Elaborated Codes	148
5.6 Conclusion	150

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	151-163
6.1 Revisiting the Research Approach	154
6.2 Theoretical Paradigms and Summary of Findings	154
6.2.1 Labov	154
6.2.2 Bernstein	154
6.2.3 Nair	156
6.2.4 Toolan	158
6.3 Strengths and Limitations	159
6.4 Conclusion and Future Directions	162
REFERENCES	164-176
<i>Appendices</i>	A-I - A-lxxvii
<i>Brief Bio-data of the Author</i>	