

## **Inclusion and Reforms in Indonesian Teacher Education: An Odyssey in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Veronica L. Diptoadi and Susana Teopilus  
Widya Mandala Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia**

### **Abstract**

This paper discusses how teacher education departments in Indonesia should prepare themselves for the reforms in the Indonesian educational system to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It starts with a short overview of the reforms needed in Indonesian education from elementary until tertiary level in order to create qualified human resources. The second section focuses on the changes to be proposed in the curriculum of teacher education, which will comprise a paradigm shift in the preparation of teachers with a learner-centered focus and the application of technology in the learning process. As a consequence of this shift, the third section discusses the possibilities of applying inclusive education in the Indonesian school system particularly in teacher education. What efforts have been and will be done by one of the oldest Teacher Education Department in East Java in preparing students to become highly qualified teachers for the future are elaborated. These efforts cover the short and long term goals. The former is to prepare teachers for inclusive education, which will accommodate students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom. The latter is to prepare the Department itself to integrate such students in the regular educational setting. Some research findings and samples of interactive instructional materials accompany.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century heralds the arrival of the knowledge age. An age of communication, knowledge and learning made possible by advances in information and communication technology (henceforth, ICT). In facing this new era, Indonesia is also feeling the pressing need to improve the quality of her human resources through education and a better access to knowledge.

According to Diptoadi, Teopilus, and Pranjoto (2001) to reach this access, Indonesia is trying to make use of the rapid advances in ICT which promises to bring far-reaching changes more quickly: greater access to information, better communications and improved quality in professional skills. With the influence of technology in education and the development of ICT, a lot of learning resources have become available for learners. As a consequence, the teacher is not anymore the sole information resource. Thus, an alternative type of education is needed for the learners to develop themselves maximally using all the resources they can get. Although the teacher is still the most important person in creating a learning

environment appropriate for optimizing student learning, it is the student who should become the centre of the learning process.

In order to create a learner-centered education, a lot of reforms have to be made in the Indonesian educational system. The first is the integration of thinking skills in the curriculum. The teacher should use various methods such as problem-solving inquiry in the presentation of the materials to make the students able to think critically, creatively and systematically. Second, language skills should be emphasized, because a good mastery of the native language (in this case, Bahasa Indonesia) will help students maintain cultural values, while the mastery of English can make them become an active member of the global community. The third is the core curriculum approach. With this approach the elementary and secondary curriculum would only have a few compulsory subjects, such as math, science, language, physical education and arts, while the rest are optional, taken by the students according to their interest and ability. Furthermore, with only a few subjects to teach, the teacher can present a topic seen from different aspects. Thus, the students are able not only to have an in-depth and holistic comprehension of each topic, but also to see the interconnections among the various fields of study and their relevance in daily life. The fourth is the use of advanced technology, such as ICT in education. For example using the internet students can download the latest information about almost any topic, exchange ideas with people all over the world through e-mail or video conferencing. Therefore, as the teacher is not anymore the sole provider of information, students can tap information from other resources and learn by themselves according to their own pace, time and place.

To accommodate this new trend in education, we as educators should refocus our attention from teaching to student learning. In other words, we should rethink our roles as teachers and the role of students in the learning process. Diptoadi (1997: 4) stated that nowadays the teacher is assigned a multiple role, such as: 1) to become counselors, fine tuning the learning program to the different needs and capabilities of the learners, 2) to choose the learning material and assess the learners' work, 3) to encourage and motivate learners and 4) to deal with individual problems on an individual base. Thus what we need is a complete paradigm shift in the Indonesian educational system. To accelerate this shift, teacher training and education programs in Indonesia have got a heavy burden that they have to educate teachers who will be able to adapt themselves to the changes required in this century, one of which is how to prepare graduates of teacher training and education program to teach in an inclusive setting program.

### **Inclusive Education in the Indonesian school system**

According to the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), "Inclusive Education is a human right, it's good education and it makes good social sense". The reasons behind this statement is that Inclusive Education (IE) is a human right, as children have the right to learn together, they should not be discriminated because of their disability or learning difficulty. IE means good education because children learn better academically and socially in an integrated environment, besides that given the right commitment and support IE uses educational resources more efficiently. With IE there will be an improvement in social sense, because inclusion will reduce fear and build friendship, respect and understanding, so children can develop meaningful relationships and be prepared for life in society.

In line with these arguments, IE can be defined as a system of education where disabled and non-disabled children and young people learn together in ordinary pre-school provision, schools, colleges and universities, with appropriate networks of support (CSIE). Thus, to support the process of inclusion, Indonesian schools have to make a commitment to the principles of IE, working together with special schools in the reallocation of their extensive resources such as money, equipment and their expertise (teaching and non-teaching staff) into the regular classroom. Furthermore, the schools have to provide special initial and in-service training for teachers. In the latter case, teacher education program can contribute to the application of IE by inserting in the curriculum subjects which prepare their students to work in inclusive settings.

### **Preparing for inclusive education**

The Directorate of Special Education, which is a division under the Indonesian Ministry of Education, is now in the midst of preparing a new regulation about Inclusive Educational Services for students with special needs and Learning Disabilities. In a speech in August 2002, the Director of Special Education Department emphasized the fact that based on the 1945 State Law of Indonesia, chapter 31, item 1 every citizen is entitled to an equal opportunity to receive education. Therefore, students with special needs and learning disabilities have the right to obtain an equal opportunity in education (Nasichin, 2002). Special needs in this case are children who are deaf, blind, mentally retarded or physically handicapped, while learning disabilities are children who have writing, reading or mathematical learning difficulties, emotional disturbance, speech, vision or hearing impairments as well as underachievers and slow learners.

To serve those particular students, the school has to collect complete information about their condition in order to design appropriate instruction for them. For this purpose the school usually takes the following steps:

1. Identify which child has learning difficulties, such as being frequently ill, feeling sleepy in class, being difficult to concentrate, being slow in comprehending the lesson or underachieving.
2. Divide the children into two categories: those who can be handled by the teacher using a special instruction designed for their needs. The second consists of children who have to be referred to another expert such as a psychologist or a medical doctor for further examination. If there are no professionals available, then a special education expert can be asked to do the job.
3. Classify those who have been referred into those who really need special education services and those who do not. For the former group, the teacher has to communicate with their respective parents to tell them about the condition of their child. For the latter group if there are no clear signs about the cause of their learning difficulties, they will be returned to the regular class.
4. Design the appropriate individual program according to the special needs of the children.
5. Evaluate whether the specially designed program is successful or not. If it is not, it should be redesigned repeatedly.

This process will be done continuously whenever those children with special needs are going to be promoted to the next grade or whenever new students are coming in the first grade of elementary school.

### **Application of inclusive education in Indonesian schools**

To obtain a better view of how schools prepare themselves to apply IE in their classrooms, the writers visited some schools in Surabaya. The first school visited was a private one called Intan Permata Hati (IPH) which is located in the suburbs of Surabaya. IPH has a playgroup, a kindergarten and an elementary school. Based on the writers' observation and interview with the School Board, the Principal and some teachers of the elementary level, the following things were noted:

1. The school has excellent facilities, such as air-conditioned classrooms, a library, a computer room and a large playground.
2. The classes are spacious and can accommodate a maximum of 25 students. This is a small number compared to other schools which have generally about 40 students and only 1 teacher in each room.
3. The classes at IPH are well-decorated according to the topic of the week. Every class has a permanent class teacher who assists the subject teachers of English, Math, and Science.

From our visit to some classes, we noticed that there were some students with learning disabilities, such as attention deficit disorders (ADD), hyperactive, cerebral palsy and eye disorders. Those students with special needs work together in groups with the other regular students who seem to accept them as they are. The special students receive extra help from the teacher if needed. Parents are involved in the decision of how they would like their children to be handled. Medical advice and counseling are provided by the school for the parents, students and teachers.

The situation in the classes we visited was lively and students enjoyed the learning process. The students with learning disabilities looked cheerful and they seemed to have a good relationship with their classmates. Furthermore, according to the Principal as well as the teachers, those students could follow the lessons with some extra help of the teachers either in class or outside class hours.

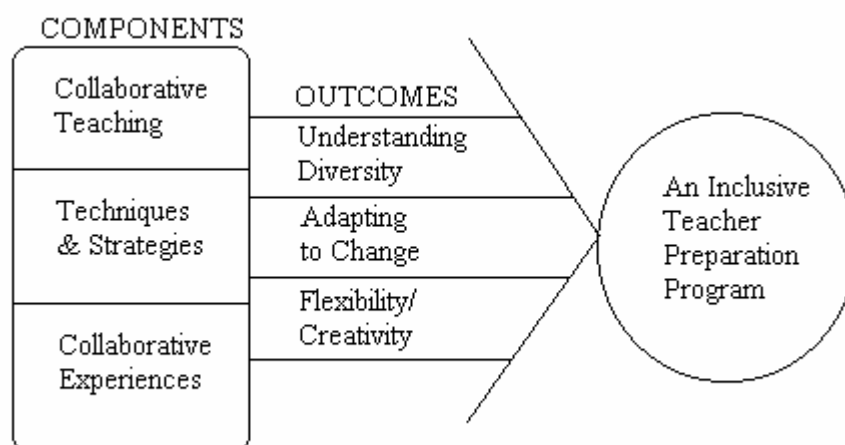
The second school that we visited was a state elementary school. It was chosen by the Ministry of Education as one of the model schools in Indonesia where inclusive education is going to be tried out in the next school year. The school is strategically located as it is next to a school for children with special needs and also it is in the compound of the Department of Special Needs Education of the Surabaya State University. The school has made some exterior as well as interior changes. The walls look bright and clean. Each class can only accommodate a maximum of 25 students, which is small in number compared to other schools which have normally around 40 students in one class. At the moment there is only one teacher in each class; however, in the next school year this teacher will work in collaboration with a special education teacher when necessary. Peer teaching is applied in the class, where the best student is asked to help their slower classmates in explaining the lesson given. All this is done in good spirit and it seems to work wonderfully, as the slow students are not ashamed to ask for help and they do improve. The government has also provided a brand new computer lab and a language lab for the schools, so

students can learn individually if needed. The student with special needs and learning disabilities will be selected from the nearby Special Education School using the five steps mentioned before. So far the school has been able to identify 43 students with learning disabilities and 4 with speaking difficulties. Besides the regular and special education teachers, the school also employs a psychologist who assists the teachers as well as the parents in solving the students' emotional and learning problems.

### **Preparation of future teachers**

In meeting with the challenge of the twenty-first century, future teachers in Indonesia should be prepared to accommodate diversity in the classroom, or move toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. To reach the goal, as Whitworth (1999) argues, the educational system, structure and practices need to shift and become more flexible, more inclusive, and more collaborative in order to better accommodate students with learning disabilities. In other words, future teachers should realize that each pupil or student is unique and they should be willing to accept and guide each of them so that they can develop themselves as optimally as possible. Learner-centered, rather than teacher-centered learning, is to be applied in the classroom. It is indeed not easy; however, it is possible for teacher education faculties to start it by making changes in the curriculum and syllabi to prepare these future teachers.

Whitworth (ibid. p. 3) states that if teacher education programs are to prepare educators to be successful in the classroom of the future, they must reconceptualize and redesign their approach to perceive preservice preparation of teachers. He proposes a model for developing and implementing an inclusive teacher preparation program as follows:



This model provides a framework for developing and implementing a teacher education program that will prepare teachers to teach in inclusive educational settings. According to Whitworth (ibid. p. 4), in the program outcomes, future teachers are prepared to be able to (a) understand and appreciate diversity in their students, (b) adapt to change due to the uncertain types of situations and challenges that they will face in the coming decades, and (c) develop flexibility and creative problem-solving skills and view situations from different perspectives. The components supporting this model according to Whitworth include (1) collaborative teaching, (2) techniques and strategies and (3) collaborative experiences.

Finally, Whitworth (ibid. p. 7) argues that if colleges and universities are to prepare teachers to teach in inclusive settings, they must mirror inclusive practices in their preparation programs, although it is not easy to do so comprehensively in higher education. It may be more successful to begin on a smaller basis with two or three faculty members leading the way for others. He believes that once the effectiveness, desirability and potential of such practices have been demonstrated, the stage may be set for developing a more formal, comprehensive model.

With the autonomy given by the Indonesian Ministry of Education to tertiary education in Indonesia, education faculties can plan on the steps to realize the expectation. The English Department of the Teacher-Training Faculty of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya (henceforth: WMCUS) has made several efforts in training the future teachers; these efforts cover the short-term and the long-term goals, and to a great extent what the Department has been doing so far is live with what Whitworth (ibid. p. 6) proposed to be a model for inclusive teacher preparation.

The short term goal is to prepare the future teachers for the more inclusive type of education, and this is done by:

- 1. Familiarizing the future teachers with independent learning.** To facilitate this, the Department has already established the self-access centre and the multi media laboratory. These two laboratories, with their typical characteristics, have been operating and collaborating in enhancing the teaching-learning process, both giving emphasis on open-learning and independent-learning processes outside the classroom sessions (Diptoadi et al., 2001).

In the self-access laboratory, students have access and opportunity to do self-study in accordance with their own learning strategies. They can work together with other friends (group work), or alone, without the direct control of a teacher. Some counselors are always available there to give some help when needed. There are various kinds of self-access materials such as packaged print materials (Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Structure, Vocabulary), audio materials, audio-visual materials, CD ROMs, computer-aided language learning modules (ready-made as well as teacher-made) and other learning resources ranging from elementary level to advanced level.

In the multimedia laboratory, in addition to having access and opportunity to learn English by working on modules from the teachers, using other computer-based resources, or seeking needed information and references through internet, the students are also taught how to produce computerized English learning materials. Thus, this multimedia laboratory also functions as the production place for computer-based modules made and developed by the students and the teachers, which will later be used for students' independent learning resources. These two laboratories indeed have enabled the students to develop themselves at their own pace. Once, they have been accustomed to doing it, they will be able to encourage and facilitate their future students to do the same.

2. **Familiarizing the future teachers with cooperative and collaborative way of learning.** Cooperative and collaborative work have enabled the students of this Department to support and help one another in their study. The theories of this are taught and explained to them in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) subject, one of the subjects offered at this Department. The practice of these theories is also applied to other subjects such as Speaking, Writing, ESP, and others. These things have made them learn that cooperative and collaborative work can support them all and the result is that all can grow together by willingly helping and accepting one another.
3. **Revising and improving the present curriculum to accommodate subjects to prepare future teachers for more inclusive education.** In these subjects, the students will be taught such things as helping students to overcome learning difficulties, learner-centered assessment, and early childhood education. In addition to that, they are also given more chances to have some real practice in applying their knowledge in real schools. It is hoped that having been equipped with knowledge and practices, they will be prepared to accept the inclusive education in the future. Furthermore, as a preparation for it, the Department is sending 2 lecturers abroad to take their further studies, one of them will be majoring in teaching speaking skills and overcoming speaking problems/difficulties and the other will be majoring in teaching reading and overcoming reading difficulties in children.
4. **Improving the Teaching Methods in the English Department.** The Department is cognizant of the importance of preparing its own teaching staff to face this challenge and to implement the revised curriculum. This is done by having seminars and workshops on Competency-based Curriculum and its assessment, cooperative and collaborative teaching, learner-centered assessment, and integrated curriculum. The results of these seminars and workshops will then be applied in the collaborative team teaching of some of the subjects offered at the Department. Thus, students will have a good model of how collaborative teaching is done including collaborative planning for classes and collaborative evaluation of students.

The first two efforts have been carried out so far in the Department; the last two are still in progress. The longer term goal is to establish a Child Development Centre in collaboration with the Faculty of Psychology of WMCUS and Malaspina University College at Nainamo, Canada specifically with its Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program. As a start two series of seminars on Early Childhood were conducted in 1999 and 2001. Teachers of Kindergarten and Elementary Schools from Surabaya and its surroundings were invited to those seminars. It is planned by the Department that two faculty members (one from the English Department and one from the Faculty of Psychology) will be sent to Nainamo in February 2004 to attend lectures in ECEC and visit the schools there to observe how inclusive education is carried out. In April 2004 one or two instructors of ECEC are going to give a series of lectures on the integration of children with learning disabilities in the regular classroom.

This Child Development Centre will focus on helping children to become emotionally well-balanced individuals as well as assisting children who have learning disabilities.

The Centre will employ language teachers, a psychologist, a speech therapist and a reading specialist.

### **Conclusion**

Indonesia still has a long way to go to reform its teacher education. A lot of obstacles, political financial as well as social problems hinder the government as well as the schools in providing good education for the people. In spite of these problems we still feel that teacher education should become a priority, because the quality of education for our nation depends on the quality of our teachers. What we urgently need at this moment is a strong commitment and collaborative efforts of the government, education planners and society to improve teacher education so the teaching quality can be enhanced at all levels. However, the welfare of the teachers should also be given serious consideration, if we want to create dedicated people to the teaching profession. Only then will it be possible to establish good schools to become supportive communities for the learners. And, thus, inclusive education will emerge naturally.

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