CHINA

Ms. Yunying Chen
Director of Special Education Division,
China National Institute for Education Research

Online Resource Center in Supporting Inclusive Education

In line with the objectives of project on "Promotion of Basic Education for Children with Special Needs" by UNESCO PROAP and China's policy on inclusive education and application of information communication technology in improving teaching and learning quality, a web resource center was designated in application of strengths of information technology in supporting inclusive education. The web resource center for the special needs, China Online for the Special Needs (COSN) at http ://www.specialneeds.org.cn, has build capacities in : promotion of basic education, creation of alternatives for problem solving, providing direct feedback, offering sustainable mechanism, dissemination of information in distance, serving numerous people with no limitation, providing interaction among people and institutes, sharing large amount of information and knowledge, creating opportunity for collaboration, delivery of message and information to individuals directly, and searching of solutions.

This paper presented the recent development in online resource development in supporting school improvement , which include the international initiative and national actions, the rational and needs of the situation in China for such a development, the strengths and outcome of the online resource center, and the current issues and undertaking action for continuing the development.

The Background

Efforts in promoting education for all and including the special need individuals have been documented in several events in the region and in the global actions. They were: Asia-Pacific Program of Education for All (APPEAL, 1987), The World Declaration on Education for All (Jometien, Thailand, 1990), The Asia pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993-2002 (Beijing, China, 1992), and World conference on Special needs education: Access and Quality, in which the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education was adopted. (UNESCO, 1994).

These mentioned actions aim to inform countries for restructuring education by the principle of inclusion and by recognition of the need to work towards "school for all." In this educational initiative schools are institutions, which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs. In this regard we seek innovative mechanism to support school

development in addition to traditional support, i.e. legislation and policymaking, teacher education, curriculum innovation, classroom management, etc. As we looked around, we found Information communication technology is the area which full of potential in helping implementation of inclusive education.

In the late 80's China recognized the delayed development in providing education for the special needs (NSD, 1987). The endeavor to promote education to the special needs launched in 1988. In a review, Chen identified (Chen, 1996) several powerful mechanisms contributing to the achievement of special needs education nowadays. They were making legislation to protect the right of the disabled person, enacting regulations to implement educational programmers, and mandating national policy for inclusion, and etc.

After all that have achieved what would be the next and crucial actions for promotion of the special needs education in China? Baring this concern in mind and in collaboration with UNESCO PROAP, the Chinese delegates attended two workshops aiming in "Promotion of Basic Education for Children with Special Needs" in Bangkok in 1999. As a result of these two workshops China proposed to develop a web site in supporting the special needs education.

Later, it was approved that within the framework of the project "Promotion of Basic Education for Children with Special Needs" the Special education Division of the China National Institute for Educational Research carry out activities to develop the web site.

The activities undertaken were:

1. Organize a meeting of the project team for conceptualization of the resource center.
2. Design a Web-Resource Center.
3. Identify list of resources for inclusive education by giving questionnaires to teachers concerning their needs of teaching and learning
4. Collect resources from national resource centers.

The rationale -Why a Web Site

The needs of China

The national policy made in 1988 mandated that the special needs education is an crucial component of universalization of basic education.   In this regard China's education became in favor of providing education to the special needs in the inclusive setting. A statement made to clarify this vision was that the special needs should be "learning in the regular classes" and that "regular schools should be the main body of educational provision for the special needs children". The outcomes of this national policy has lead to:

a. Two third of the special needs children enrolled in schools nowadays receiving education in regular classroom.
b. The special schools has been identified as resource center, and a town with 300 thousand population should set up such a center to support the development of the special needs

education. The number of schools was 1500 more in 1999 and deceased to 1100 in 2002.

c. There are a million of elementary schools in China. Assuming one tenth of schools involved in integration program, the support and management of 100 thousand schools become a critical point for future planning.

d. With assistance from UNICEF, UNESCO, and NGO, government of China implemented inclusive education in every province, region, and city in China ; including the under developing province or region such as Xin Jiang, Qing Hai, and Gui Zhou. In the agenda reaching the unreachable places and in supporting their continuing development become the priority.

All of the mentioned development just achieved in a decade or so, How can China manage such massive numbers of program? How can we continuing support the development for diversity of needs of different region and province? How can we collect information, disseminate materials, sharing resources, and exchange experience. The solution for China was a web resource center.

The Strengths of Web Resource Center

According to UNESCO, Information technology is the scientific, technological and engineering disciplines and the management techniques used in information handling and processing ; their applications ; computers and their interaction with men and machines ; and associated social, economic and cultural matters.

The objectives of the development of online resource center, in brief, were:

a. To develop guidelines for inclusive education practice in the areas of schools development, management of inclusive education, training of education personnel, educational support services, and community support.

b. To synthesize and share practical experience with regard to effective provision of education for children with special needs.

c. To strengthen national capacity to design, plan and implement educational initiatives for children with special needs; and

d. To select, modify and create appropriate training and support materials to enhance capacity and empower key personnel working with children with special needs.

In accordance with these objectives and the needs of China's development. A web resource center was designated utilize strengths of information technology. A web resource center has capacity in:

● Promotion of basic education
● Innovation for problem solving
● Providing direct feedback
● Offering sustainable mechanism
● Dissemination of information in distance
● Serving numerous people with no limitation

- Providing interaction among people and institutes
- Sharing large amount of information and knowledge
- Creating opportunity for collaboration
- Delivery of message and information to individuals directly
- Searching of solutions

Clients of the Center

In conceptualization of the resource center meetings and interviews with schools personnel and specialists in the field were applied to collect idea and information. Concluding from our study, major objectives of the center was to provide information and services to:
- Promote public awareness of needs of children with special needs.
- Government in planning and making policy for the special needs education
- Inslitutions and organization which providing services to the special needs
- Chinese organizations of the special needs in communication with international community
- The specialists for collaboration and on line counseling.
- Parents and family members of children with special needs
- Individuals with special needs in fulfilling their individual needs
- Manufacturers for demonstration of materials and devices in quality education and quality life of the special needs

Content of the Center

China Interaction - Center for the Special Needs (CI-CSN) included 15 components. They are:

-Organization and institution	-Dr. Chen Office
-Inclusive program	-The special Needs
-Resources center	-Topic for the month
-Sharing of Experience	-Donation of Love
-Urgency request	-Exhibition
-New Books and materials	-News Center
-Media Center	-Membership
-Window of the World	

Current issues and undertaking Activities

The online resource center requires large amount of data and information input as well as virtual activities each day. We are now carrying out national survey to understand what are needs and expectation of teachers and students from special schools and regular schools. China's government had launched school networking project, which aimed to connect most of the schools

in china by Internet by year 2010. There are infrastructure issues to deal with, and in teaching and learning concerns the special needs the whole nation still lack of a comprehensive collaboration in improving education quality. Competition among schools may have caused

Further isolation in using ICT for teaching and learning purpose. Second issue is personnel training in application of information technology. Even in big city such as Beijing, schoolteachers are not familiar with the skills in applying technology in teaching. Various training programme will be needed to assist teachers, parents, and children with special needs in application of the center's resources. In addition to information sharing there are many interaction functions should be implemented so that the center will be equipped with efficient function for the users. These includes data base development, discussion group, open curriculum, people to people counseling. Our greatest concern is the remote areas in China where have no access to the center's information.

References

UNESCO (1993) Sub-Regional Seminar on Policy, Planning and Organization of Education for Children with Special Needs, Harbin, China, 1-4 February 1993. Final Report Paris: UNESCO.

Yun, X. (1994). China In K. Mazurek and M.A. Winzer (Eds.) Comparative Studies in Special Education. Washington, DC: Gaullaudet University Press.

UNESCO (1999) Planning Meeting to Develop the Project Plan for the Promotion of Basic Education for Children with Special Needs, Bangkok UNESCO PROAP.

James Lynch (1994) Provision for children with Special Needs in the Asia Region, The World Bank, Washington, D.C.

UNESCO (1999) One School for All Children, EFA 2000 Bulletin, http://unesco.uneb.edu/unesco/efa-32/overview.htm.

Yunying Chen (1996) Making Special Education Compulsory and Inclusive in china. Cambridge Journal of Education, Vol.26, No. 1,