Special Schools as a Resource for Inclusive Education

Kate Lapham and
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A Review of the Open Society Foundations' Experience Working with Special Schools in Armenia

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Contents

Executive Summary

The Armenian system of special education was established during the Soviet era in the 1920s. Disability of children in the Soviet system was identified during preschool education, which included children as young as three months of age through six years old. Physical disability was identified by pediatricians and children were placed in special preschools for children with physical disabilities. Intellectual disabilities and developmental delays were identified and established before children entered first grade at the age of seven. Children with special educational needs attended special schools. These were either day schools or boarding schools for children from remote regions or villages (Gibson, 1980; Anderson, Silver, and Velkoff, 1987). Armenia maintained this dual system of education after its declaration of independence in 1991. In 1992, the country ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child which led to the adoption of the Law of Children's Rights in 1996. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which includes a commitment to provide for inclusive education (UN CRPD, Article 24), was opened for signature in 2007. Armenia ratified it in 2010.

The Open Society foundation in Armenia began working with schools in the early 1990s in an engagement that included several of the special and mainstream schools later involved in the special school resource center project. The idea behind this project was to draw on the expertise that exists in the special education system. In addition to ensuring that inclusive schools would have appropriate support for children with a variety of special education needs (SEN), this approach also sought to win over special schools to the cause of inclusion. Campaigns for inclusion and deinstitutionalization of children often encounter opposition from special schools because they have an institutional interest in keeping their doors open and because their staff are concerned about the children they serve. The Armenia Open Society foundation hypothesized that a resource center model providing specialist support for children with SEN in mainstream schools would gradually depopulate the special

schools while simultaneously building a place for their professional expertise in a new, inclusive education system.

International experience demonstrates that the process of transition from segregated to inclusive schooling must be well-planned, carefully supported, and gradually implemented with significant feedback mechanisms for monitoring and modifying support (Avramidis, 2002). This includes working with teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders to be sure that they are informed and have the opportunity to ask questions. This review of the Armenia Open Society foundation's support to three special schools as resource centers for inclusive education looks at the factors important to promoting greater inclusion in education through four lenses: (1) special schools as resource centers; (2) teachers and the school environment; (3) parents and the community; and (4) additional factors relevant to the policy environment of the developing and transition countries. Observations from site visits and material gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups are used to review what has been accomplished so far through the Armenia Open Society foundation's support and to provide recommendations for further research and programming.

Our study found that acceptance of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools and respecting their right to be among their peers was clearly expressed by special and inclusive school principals and personnel participating in this study. During interviews and focus-groups, all participants emphasized the values of inclusive education. They said that inclusion should be the union of the two systems where the value and the strengths of both are balanced and where the specialized targeted approach of special education complements work in mainstream classrooms. The Armenian Open Society foundation's work, in collaboration with other donors and NGOs, has moved discussions of both policy and practice toward greater inclusion in a very significant way.

However, inclusion is not only an idea, it is a practice. Policymakers, school principals, and parents all expressed uncertainty regarding the philosophy and pedagogy from general and special educators based on their assessment of insufficient training and preparation of class teachers. Staff at special schools were anxious that students develop their skills and knowledge at inclusive schools. Their main concern is that inclusive school teachers do not have experience and "are completely uninformed about the needs of different children with SEN and how to work with them." These concerns are based on their visits and lesson observations, as well as questions raised by teacher-trainees during trainings. Specialists at the school for children with hearing disabilities also raised the question of the deaf community and culture.

These concerns point to the need for more support for classroom teachers in inclusive schools and mirror the transitions to inclusive education in other countries. Overall, the attitudes of staff at special schools toward inclusion indicated that they were very positive but also cognizant of the challenges ahead. With the appropriate level of training and experience teachers at inclusive schools will be able to provide good education to students with SEN. The principals of all seven mainstream schools participating in the study were also supportive of inclusive education. They reported that the opportunity to observe and build experience before jumping in with both feet has been invaluable. By working in partnership with schools rather than trying to impose reform from above, the process becomes much more sustainable.

Furthermore, exposure to inclusive education practices has given schools the tools to deal with challenges that they have faced all along. All principals affirmed that their decision was based on the fact that they have always had children with special needs or mild disabilities who were not officially categorized as such and were accepted to school for various reasons, such as parents' requests for not taking the child to a special school located in a far away district or the attendance of a sibling at the same school.

 As the initiators of official inclusion at their schools, principals initially dealt with a certain degree of opposition from teachers and the parents of the general population students by holding group meetings and discussions. They also faced the disapproving attitudes of non-inclusive school principals as well as displeasure from the community where the school is located. The principals' approach to these challenges successfully nullified opposition to reform and allowed for the dispersion of inclusive education in Armenia in 82 schools throughout the education system.

Beyond the conclusions our respondents drew about inclusive education in Armenia, this study began as an effort to evaluate a project by the Open Society foundation in Armenia to develop three special schools for children with disabilities as resource centers for inclusive education in mainstream schools. We had hoped to assess the progress of the project to date and to provide recommendations for the foundation in Armenia on ways to take the project forward to promote the cause of inclusive education in Armenia, and perhaps, the post-Soviet region. The study has revealed that the Armenia foundation did not implement the project in the traditional sense of a time-bound set of activities to be measured against predetermined indicators. Instead, the project had evolved over time as an integral part of the Armenian Open Society foundation's education strategy. It grew naturally from existing partnerships with schools and a growing interest from the Armenia foundation's board and staff in the rights of people with disabilities.

This made the project much more difficult to evaluate because it lacked the structure of most projects and thus defied attempts to fit it into a standard evaluation framework. However, it is also a tremendous strength because the natural evolution of the idea of special schools as resource centers (which is not unique to Armenia) from existing partnerships and on-going conversations meant that the beneficiaries, composed of participating schools, felt that they had generated the idea of working together and viewed the Open Society foundation Armenia as a partner rather than a donor. Striking a balance between the need to plan funding and set priorities and the need to ensure ownership is very difficult. The foundation has done this admirably through ongoing discussions of its emerging priorities with existing partners and by firmly rooting its education strategy in the frameworks of community participation and human rights.

As the Open Society foundation Armenia takes its work forward, we hope that it will maintain the strong partnerships that it has built and continue to support work with teachers, parents, and communities. It will also be important to continue to provide professional development opportunities for the staff of the special schools as they continue to act as resources for others.

We conclude our study with recommendations at the levels of policy and practice that we hope will be helpful in focusing future work and strategy development for the foundation. These may be useful for other donors, NGOs, or agencies working to advance inclusive education in Armenia and beyond. The recommendations that have emerged from our research are the following:

- Continue to support special school staff with professional development to promote inclusion

- Support special school resource centers in publicizing their support services

- Encourage special schools to offer support for the assessment of students with SEN as new rules begin to take effect

- Support the development of Professional Learning Communities and collaboration among teachers at inclusive schools

- Advocate for the incorporation of paid teaching assistants in the classroom

- Maintain the links between inclusive education and the rest of the foundation's education strategy

List of Abbreviations

ADB   Asian Development Bank
BoH   Bridge of Hope
CRPD   Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ESP   Open Society Education Support Program
GESB   General Education Sub-Board
IEP   Individual Education Plan
MoES   Ministry of Education and Science
NIE   National Institute of Education
PLC   Professional Learning Community
SEN   Special Education Needs
WB   World Bank

Acknowledgements

Authors

Kate Lapham has worked on education programs in the former Soviet Union since 1997. During her tenure with the Open Society Foundations, she has worked with both the Education Support Program and Early Childhood Program to support Open Society foundations and partner NGOs in the countries of the region in developing high quality programs with a particular focus on disadvantaged children including children with disabilities, minority and minority language children, and rural populations with limited access to early childhood development services. She holds a bachelor's of science in Foreign Service (cum laude) from Georgetown University and a master's degree in public administration from Columbia University. She is currently a PhD candidate at Lehigh University.

Hayarpi Papikyan holds a master's degree in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language from the American University of Armenia and a master's in education degree in comparative and international education from Lehigh University. Besides her language teaching practice in Armenia, she worked for educational projects organized for children from socially disadvantaged families and rural areas from 2001–2005. These projects included summer camps, extra-curricular activities, and clubs. From 2006–2008 she volunteered for an educational initiative supporting socially disadvantaged young women from rural areas to receive vocational education in Yerevan. She has completed evaluation projects for the Study Abroad Office and "Global Village" business and entrepreneurial summer program at Lehigh University, and curriculum and assessment projects for the Department of Environmental Conservation & Research and Department of English Programs at American University of Armenia.

*States ... **recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education [and] shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels** and lifelong learning directed to the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the **strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity ... enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society**.*

—UN Convention on the Rights of Persons
with Disabilities, Article 24

1. Introduction

Since 2008, the Open Society foundation in Armenia has been implementing an innovative project to support special schools for children with disabilities to act as resource centers for inclusive education in mainstream schools. The Armenia foundation began working with schools in the early 1990s in an engagement that included several of the special and mainstream schools later involved in the special school resource center project. The idea behind this project was to draw on the expertise that exists in the special education system. In addition to ensuring that inclusive schools would have appropriate support for children with a variety of special education needs (SEN), this approach also sought to win over special schools to the cause of inclusion. Campaigns for inclusion and deinstitutionalization of children often encounter opposition from special schools because they have an institutional interest in keeping their doors open and because their staff are concerned about the children they serve. The Open Society foundation in Armenia hypothesized that a resource center model providing specialist support for children with SEN in mainstream schools would gradually depopulate the special schools while simultaneously building a place for their professional expertise in a new, inclusive education system.

There are many organizations advocating inclusive practices in Armenia, including local NGOs like Bridge of Hope, and international donors like Mission East, UNICEF, and World Vision. This study undertakes a formative evaluation of this project of the Open Society foundations Armenia at the request of the Open Society Foundations' General Education Sub-Board (GESB). The GESB is responsible for providing strategic advice and oversight for the Open Society Education Support Program (ESP), which has provided co-funding for the Armenia foundation's work. In an environment where others are also working to advance inclusive education, it was important for the GESB to understand the specific contribution that Open Society Foundations' funding has made. Thus, our study examines the following: 1) the role of special schools as resource centers, 2) shifts in the education reform context in

Armenia that may have been influenced by the Open Society foundation Armenia's work, and 3) the ways that the development of this specific project has interacted and responded to a shifting context to produce a positive impact.

Our research examines the education reform context in Armenia, focusing on the support of inclusion by policymakers. In particular, the study explores training and curricula in schools, as well as the support and attitudes of different stakeholders toward inclusive education. Furthermore, it examines how a special school can act as a resource center for inclusive education in Armenia as well as how financial and technical support from the Open Society foundation in Armenia had contributed to the successes or challenges of this model. Finally, we also examine how the Armenia foundation's project developed and evolved from an engagement with schools to a focused intervention to support inclusive education. More specifically, our inquiry was guided by three main research questions, which are reproduced in full in Appendix 1:

- What does it mean in practical terms for a special school to act as a resource center for inclusion? What do different stakeholders perceive as most/least valuable in terms of activities, resources, and experiences provided by these centers?

- What changes have taken place in the inclusive mainstream schools to support children with disabilities? What do different stakeholders perceive as most and least valuable?

- What is the reform context within which inclusive education initiatives are implemented in Armenia? How supportive are different stakeholders about inclusive education policy and practice? How have the reform context and the evolution of the Armenia foundation's work influenced each other?

The primary focus of the study was on the activities that three special schools[1] undertook throughout the 2009/2010 academic year and continued during the 2011/2012 academic year toward becoming resource centers. These activities include trainings of inclusive school teachers; consultation and trainings for parents, and home training for the children with special needs; creation and development of teaching materials and syllabi; teacher trainings for regional teachers and parents, organization of round table discussions; interactive seminars with the parents and the

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1. Yerevan Special School # 8 for Children with Speech Impairments, Yerevan Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments, and Yerevan Psychological, Pedagogical, and Medical Assessment Center—Boarding School #5 for Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

students at inclusive schools; and training and preparation of students at Yerevan State Pedagogical University.

Additionally, the review focuses on the technical and political support that this model of special schools as resource centers needs for sustainable development in the future. The intent of these three schools to enhance inclusion and the extent to which this has been achieved cannot be seen in isolation from the educational system in which they are located; therefore, the review also concentrates on inclusive mainstream schools. Our review focuses on those four mainstream schools, which participated in the initiative and received professional support from at least one of the three special schools acting as resource centers. This will help us discuss the value and need for the support and consultation provided by the resource centers, as well as the willingness of the principals, specialists, and teachers to collaborate for more successful and fluid inclusion.

Following the description of the methodology of the study, this report will provide a brief description of the education context in Armenia, an exploration of the academic literature on specific aspects of inclusive education—particularly the resource center model—and our findings from interviews and focus groups with key informants in Armenia who have participated in or been affected by the project.

2. Methodology

At the request of the Open Society foundation in Armenia, we approached this research as a formative evaluation and conducted field visits between October 2011 and February 2012. We began our research by analyzing grant documents, education strategy documents, and annual reports provided by the Armenia foundation. This was followed with a qualitative approach utilizing semi-structured interviews with school principals, ministry officials, and representatives from NGOs. Focus group sessions were conducted with teachers, specialists, parents, and students at special and inclusive schools. The study also drew upon the analysis of the teaching and learning materials and syllabi designed by the three special schools/resource centers during the 2009–2010 academic year. In order to explore our research questions we collected information from four sources, including (1) special schools supported by the Open Society foundation in Armenia, (2) inclusive mainstream schools, (3) other educational stakeholders and (4) document analysis. Each of these is described in detail below and a complete sampling framework is provided in Appendix 2.

Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Our field research targeted staff, administrators, parents, and students in both special and inclusive schools. In cases where we needed information from a small group, such as principals of inclusive schools, we used in-depth interviews. When working with larger groups where we wanted to observe interactions as well as gather information, we used focus groups. This method worked well with teachers, parents, and students. In addition, we interviewed staff of NGOs working toward inclusive education, staff from the Ministry of Education and Science, and current and former staff at the Open Society foundation in Armenia to provide background information about the education reform context in Armenia and the way that the foundation is viewed as a partner externally. A compendium of research instruments is included in Appendix 3. Iveta Silova guided the development of interview questionnaires and focus group protocols. We conducted a total of 17 interviews and 27 focus groups with 231 participants. On

average, focus group sessions and interviews lasted 50–60 minutes; however, certain sessions lasted only 30–40 minutes or over 60 minutes due to the relative enthusiasm and involvement of the participants. Following the review of sub-questions, we developed a separate series of questions to direct the course of the interviews and focus group sessions with each of the identified groups.

Considering the native language of the participants is Armenian, all questionnaires were translated into Armenian. The focus groups and several interviews at schools with teachers, parents, and students were in Armenian and led by Hayarpi Papikyan, who is a native speaker of Armenian. The interviews with the principals of special and inclusive schools, NGO representatives, and the representatives from the Ministry of Education were conducted in Russian and led by Kate Lapham, as all these participants spoke Russian as their second language. Lapham also interviewed current and former staff of the Open Society foundation in Armenia in English. The focus groups and interviews were recorded[2] and notes were taken. The names of the schools and participants were coded and all interview and focus-group data were translated into English for data analysis.

1. Special schools supported by the Open Society foundation in Armenia that later became resource centers

The Open Society foundation in Armenia has supported a variety of national educational programs since 1998. Among its multiple areas of focus (e.g., education policy

> "We don't just push our own mandate. We talk with others about our strategies and we respect their professional expertise."
>
> —Armine Tadevosyan, former staff member, Open Society foundation in Armenia

implementation, and curricular, resource and teacher development), the foundation has specifically supported activities and efforts toward the creation of an inclusive educational system in Armenia and improving social and educational inclusion of children with special needs. In this respect it has specifically supported the initiatives of three boarding schools in Yerevan: Yerevan Special School # 8, Yerevan Special School for Children with Hearing Impairments, and the Yerevan Psychological, Pedagogical, and Medical Assessment Center—Boarding School # 5 (Open Society foundation Armenia Annual Reports 2006–2009). Thus, the first source of data collection for the research is these three schools. The sample included 3 school

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2. Recordings were permanently deleted upon completion of the research.

principals, 12 specialists in each school, the 29 parents of children in the special schools, and 34 students of Yerevan State Pedagogical University who complete their training at these schools.

2. Inclusive mainstream schools working with three special schools supported by the Open Society foundation in Armenia

Data was also collected from the stakeholders of the inclusive mainstream schools, which collaborated with at least one of the above-mentioned special schools in gaining professional support and resources to organize the education of students with special needs. There are seven schools in this sample. These schools were chosen randomly from a total of 81 inclusive schools in the Republic of Armenia.[3] Respondents include the 7 principals and 2 vice-principals of these schools, 44 teachers who have students with special needs in their classrooms, 26 members of multidisciplinary teams of specialists working at the schools, and 15 parents of children with special needs. The research also sought feedback from students with special education needs (SEN). This sample included 8 students with SEN studying at special schools, 4 students with SEN at one inclusive school and 59 general students from 2 schools.

3. Other educational stakeholders

In order to understand the context in which the Armenia foundation has worked, the study also sought the perspectives of specialists from the Special Education Unit at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, and representatives from the Board of General Education. The study also obtained the views of NGO leaders who collaborated with the project in organizing certain events or activities, as well as the students of Yerevan State Pedagogical University, who receive their practical training at 3 special schools. There were 34 students who participated in 2 focus group sessions.

4. Document analysis

In addition to structured interviews and focus-group sessions, the researchers also utilized document analysis in order to better understand the processes and procedures that the three special schools have undergone as they have evolved into resource centers. Documents analyzed include the curricula and learning materials used at the

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3.   Of these schools, 42 are located in Yerevan (Ministry of Education, 2011).

special education schools and inclusive schools participating in the project, teacher training and teaching materials that were designed and developed by the schools, individual education plans (IEPs) and portfolios of students, legal and policy documents relevant to Armenia, and project documents including funding proposals and reports.

3. The Project: Historical Background, Goals, and Activities

The Armenian system of special education was established during the Soviet era in the 1920s. Disability of children in the Soviet system was identified during preschool education, which included children as young as three months of age through six years old. Physical disability was identified by pediatricians and children were placed in special preschools for children with physical disabilities. Intellectual disabilities and developmental delays were identified and established before children entered first grade at the age of seven. Children with special educational needs attended special schools. These were either day schools or boarding schools for children from regions or remote villages (Gibson, 1980; Anderson, Silver, and Velkoff, 1987). Armenia maintained this dual system of education after its declaration of independence in 1991. In 1992, the country ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child which led to the adoption of the Law of Children's Rights in 1996. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which includes a commitment to provide for inclusive education (UN CRPD, Article 24), was opened for signature in 2007. Armenia ratified it in 2010.

The goal of this research was to examine the successes and challenges faced by special schools acting as resource centers for mainstream schools that work with special needs children within this policy context and the context of funding support from the Open Society foundation in Armenia. A short historical background is necessary to better understand how the Armenia foundation has built a relationship with these three special schools and how the strategy of supporting them as resource centers for inclusion took shape. This was accomplished through a review of annual reports and education strategies provided by the Armenia foundation as well as interviews with the current education coordinator and her two predecessors.

Rather than announcing a new program in inclusive education, the Armenia foundation began this initiative through an effort to gather a network of schools interested in new methods of teaching, parent involvement, and reaching out to communities in the mid-1990s. Since its inception, the Education Program at the Open Society foundation in Armenia has concentrated on policy initiatives in the area of mainstream education, namely, standard development for civics, improving education quality and professional development of schoolteachers, enrichment of educational content, and reinforcement of collaboration between schools and the community (Open Society foundation Armenia Annual Reports, 2006–2009).

This focus continued as the foundation developed a project called Community Schools, which began in 2001 through an open call for any interested schools in Armenia to participate. Two of the special schools in the current project (the School for the Hearing Impaired and the Assessment Center–School # 5 for children with severe intellectual disabilities) submitted applications along with many mainstream schools. They were selected from the applicant pool, and through the Community Schools project they received computers, internet access, training in using information technology, and some educational resources on CD-ROM. The idea of Community Schools was to open schools to communities in order to change the Soviet tradition of the school as a closed institution. Since there was an urgent need for internet access in local communities, equipping schools with computers and internet connections was seen as a starting place to make schools both more open and more interesting to community members. Thus, the idea of inclusion began for these two schools through a project that made them more open to the surrounding community by asking them to provide internet access and meeting space to community groups not connected to inclusion or education. As children with disabilities faced problems using the centers that Community Schools established in other schools, the special schools' staff began to think about issues of inclusion (A. Tadevosyan, personal communication, October, 2011).

At the same time in 2006–2007, the Open Society foundation in Armenia was also providing direct support for the special schools through funding for extracurricular vocational training and study tours to other countries (e.g., Russia, Belarus). The special schools were also included in other activities of the foundation. For example, when the foundation's Arts and Culture Program provided support for the Puppet Theater in Yerevan to perform for school children, the children from the special schools participating in Community Schools were automatically included in the list of partner schools. In some respects, the Armenia foundation provided a unique space for administrators, teachers, and children from special educational institutions

and mainstream schools to come together to attend trainings, as well as other events and activities. As they got to know each other, staff at the Open Society foundation in Armenia and the representatives of special schools made the decision to work on the issue of inclusion. This happened about three years after the beginning of the Community Schools when participating "schools were really ready to do something for their communities, not just themselves" (A. Tadevosyan, personal communication, October, 2011).

Inclusion of children with disabilities became a strategic priority for the Armenia foundation starting in 2008 when the foundation financed an exchange with other countries in collaboration with UNICEF, giving Armenian specialists the opportunity to participate in the international conference "New Challenges for Special Schools" in Yerevan. Along with conference attendance, the exchange also allowed Armenia specialists to travel to one of the countries with best practices on special education reforms for experience sharing and to visit a number of entities providing services for children with special needs. The same activities were organized in 2009 giving Armenian specialists the possibility to participate in an international conference titled "Rethinking of Goals and Values of Special Education" which enabled Armenian specialists to visit the Czech Republic to learn about their practices on special education reforms. These visits helped inform the implementation of policy on special and inclusive education to better serve children with special needs. In addition, the Open Society foundation in Armenia provided financial and technical support to special schools to initiate wide-scale trainings of parents, psychologists, doctors, and teachers at Yerevan inclusive schools and regional towns (Open Society foundation Armenia Annual Report 2008, 2009; OSI Armenia, 2011, January).

Table 1. *Funding to Special Schools by Academic Year*

Budget Year	School # 8 (for children with speech impairments)	School for the Hearing Impaired	Assessment Center —School # 5
2009–2010	$14,120	$19,100	$25,075
2010–2011	$29,800	$29,000	$29,000
Total	$43,920	$48,100	$54,075

While the transformation of the three special schools into resource centers as a specific project goal is difficult to pinpoint, it seems to have started with the academic 2009/2010 year as discussions of ratification of the UN CRPD deepened. The education program strategy of the Armenia foundation for 2009–2011 has remained

rooted in a discourse of community participation and human rights, including the following objectives:

- To ensure equal access to basic and quality education by vulnerable groups: children with special educational needs, children at risk, and children living in rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

- To introduce best practices and national reform packages on special education that promote reforms of special education in Armenia having in mind assessment and referral of children with special educational needs; to guide boarding schools in their transformation into new models of boarding schools (school as resource center, community service center, and counseling center); to conduct a thorough analysis of the sector and the introduction of international experiences.

- To review existing policies on mainstream schools to explore the barriers hindering access to quality education; to identify needs to make the access available equally throughout the country; to demonstrate the role of accessible quality education in citizenship development; and to display to what extent education is the basis for economic development.

- To initiate public debate among professional groups and the general population and thus raise awareness of vital problems regarding equity in access to quality education and to promote respect for human rights and education justice.

The Armenia foundation further planned to leverage funds from the Open Society Foundations in 2008 and 2009 to host international conferences on inclusion in Armenia and to establish a working group in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and UNICEF, the National Institute of Education (NIE), institutions offering special education, NGOs, and international organizations that would review existing strategies and formulate recommendations on how to improve the special education field in Armenia and examine the question: "what new role can boarding schools have" (Open Society foundation Armenia, Education Strategy, 2009).

This commitment has continued into the 2010 strategy, where the foundation set the objective of "equal access to education and education as human rights" as a component of its programs. This is to be achieved by "building on the findings of the international conference [held in 2009 in Yerevan] and supporting projects to assist reforms of special schools in transforming them into models, and centers for

guidance and support services to regular/inclusive schools to better meet the needs of children with special educational needs" (Open Society foundation Armenia, Strategy Update, 2010).

During this period, activities undertaken with direct grant support to special schools included the development of services such as training for teachers and specialists, preschool support for children with disabilities, and limited networking with schools outside Yerevan. In 2010, for example, School #8 requested financial support for developing a resource center for the education system and the community; providing preschool education services for children with delays in speech development; training for specialists in mainstream schools working in inclusive classrooms; and traveling to other regions in Armenia to provide support to special educators and speech therapists (Grant Proposal, School #8). In addition to acting as resource centers for inclusive schools, these special schools have also set the goal of being resources for the community. For example, the School for the Hearing Impaired has provided sign language training for medical workers in Yerevan whose clinics' catchment areas serve hearing impaired patients (School Director, personal communication, October, 2011).

The funds that the special schools received from the Armenia foundation were used to support specific activities or to provide new services to children with disabilities and their families. No new staff positions were added to the schools to implement these projects. School budgets contain a quota of fulltime staff positions. Even if the school has extra funds in their budget, they still need permission from the district education department to create a staff position and hire someone because this is considered an ongoing operating cost. Thus, all schools had to make do with the level of staffing provided by the state budget, which is described in the table below. During interviews, directors of special schools brought up the need for continuing professional development but did not indicate that these additional activities represented a significant burden on their staff in terms of time or balancing new work with other duties (Interviews with school directors, October, 2011).

Table 2. *Special School Staffing*

	Total number of students at school	Specialists–educators	Total number of staff	Ratio of students with SEN to specialists
Special school for children with hearing impairments	154	60	80	2.5 to 1
School # 8 for children with severe speech impairments	114	40	70	3 to 1
Assessment Center –School # 5	62	68	92	1 to 1

Regardless of the availability of staff, the process, as witnessed by staff members from the Open Society foundation in Armenia, was not fluid. At first, the directors of special schools, even those who had applied to the foundation to participate, were skeptical. They doubted that teachers in the mainstream education schools would have the skills to support students with special education needs. They were afraid that the initiative would not be supported by mainstream school children in terms of attitudes and were concerned about the additional workload for their own teaching staff. However, the three special schools that had participated in Community Schools agreed to try, sending their staff to training workshops and then assigning them to mentor teachers in inclusive schools (L. Geghamyan, personal communication, October, 2011).

4. Special Schools as Resource Centers: Findings and Factors Enabling Inclusion
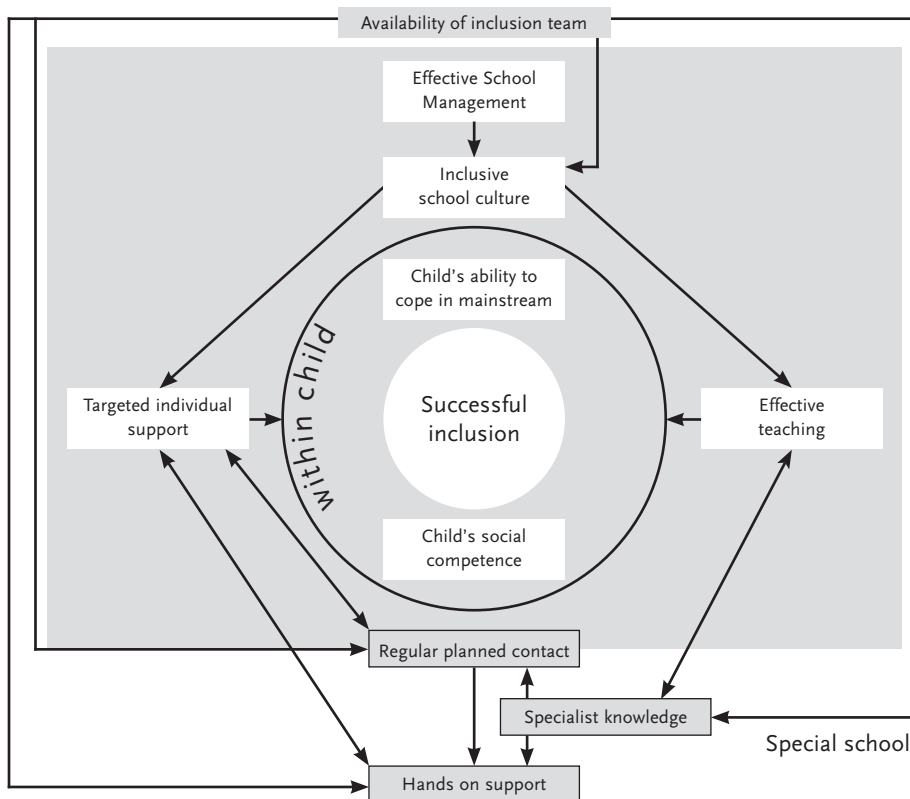
In this section we discuss the findings of our research within the broader literature on the transition to inclusive education which reveals a number of factors enabling the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools. This provides a strong framework for a formative review of the Open Society foundation in Armenia's work with special schools as well as recommendations for future program and advocacy work.

Chief among the factors associated with successful reform is the process of transitioning from segregated to inclusive schooling, which must be well-planned, carefully supported, and gradually implemented with significant feedback mechanisms for monitoring and modifying support (Avramidis, 2002). This includes working with teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders to be sure that they are informed and have the opportunity to ask questions. This would seem to be equally important regardless of the model of transition, and thus, is relevant to our consideration of the use of special schools as resource centers to support the transition to a more inclusive education system in Armenia. This review looks at these factors important to promoting greater inclusion in education through four lenses: (1) special schools as resource centers; (2) teachers and the school environment; (3) parents and the community; and (4) additional factors relevant to the policy environment of developing and transition countries. Observations from site visits and material gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups are used to review what has been accomplished so far through the Armenia foundation's support and to provide recommendations for further research and programming.

4.1   Special Schools as Resource Centers

International research on the use of special schools as resource centers for inclusion is not as extensive as the literature on inclusion. However, there are several interesting studies relevant to consideration of the model that the foundation is developing in Armenia, which strives to provide for full academic and social inclusion of children with SEN. Gibb et al. (2007) provide a useful diagram of the flow of support from the special school to the mainstream school to achieve successful inclusion. While different supports or obstacles may be present depending on the age or grade of individual children (Booth, 1987; Gibb, 2007; Head, 2007), there is general agreement that an inclusive school culture and the inclusion team's specialist knowledge are both important enabling factors for success (Gibb, 2007; Forlin 2010).

Figure 1. *Factors Related to the Effectiveness of Special Schools as Resource Centers in Armenia*

Source: Gibb, 2007

The international academic literature recommends that education authorities arrange expertise and provision of services to allow for regularly planned support, as well as ad hoc support by request from the special school (Gibb, 2007). This gives the resource center model both the necessary specificity and intensity to bring about changes in pedagogical practice (Gibb, 2007). In the model studied in Armenia, mainstream schools were not assigned to a specific special school as a resource center. Each school had permanent support personnel: a multidisciplinary team composed of five specialists. They were able to call on the three special schools as they needed support. Besides professional consultation, teams periodically collaborated with the Assessment Center–School #5, for assessing students' needs and other related technical questions. Since there are a limited number of special schools in Armenia and all are divided based on the type of disability they serve, each special school has the potential to act as a resource center for any mainstream school working with students who fit one of those disability profiles. Although they did not provide the training that the teaching and support teams at inclusive schools received, these three special schools are viewed positively as sources of support and expertise.

Barriers within this model include the nature of the child's disability, inflexible staff, inappropriate teaching strategies, and parental anxiety (Gibb, 2007; Head, 2007). When more than one institution is involved, collaboration in a three-way partnership that includes the mainstream school and the special school offering support with parents is essential for success (Gibb, 2007). In Armenia, UNICEF highlights challenges in the transformation of special schools into resource centers for inclusion in its report, *Evaluation of Inclusive Education Policies and Programs in Armenia*. Specifically, the report discusses the lack of ability and willingness of the staff to provide training and consultation to the teachers and specialists of general public schools, and maintain ongoing inter-disciplinary collaboration (Hunt, 2009). In a study of the resource center model in Hong Kong, Forlin (2010) also stresses the above mentioned four factors as significant influences on the ability of special schools to act as resource centers for inclusion (Forlin, 2010). All of these barriers existed to some extent in the schools participating in this study. The table below compares Forlin's observations of the model developed in Hong Kong with our observations of the schools in Armenia participating in the study. Each factor is also explored in greater depth in the sections that follow.

Table 3. *Factors Related to the Effectiveness of Special Schools as Resource Centers in Armenia*

Factors Enabling Inclusion (Forlin, 2010)	Observations in Armenia
The relationship between the classroom and special education teacher is defined from the beginning although teachers must see their roles as collaborative.	The relationship between the classroom teacher and special educators is defined from the very beginning when the child's learning abilities are assessed and the individual education plan (IEP) is formed. The definition of their collaboration highly depends on the level of the child's disability. In the case of severe and complex/moderate cases of disability, special educators spend more time with the student than the classroom teacher.
A preference for using paraprofessional assistants to support general classroom management rather than allocating them to a specific student. This has significant implications for the use of parents as classroom assistants.	In the classrooms we observed, when assistants were present they were dedicated to a specific student rather than supporting general classroom management. There were multiple cases when the assistants were parents of the child with a disability.
The need to establish relationships over time and have the flexibility to provide on-going support.	There was ample space for flexible ad hoc support and relationships with the special schools, particularly Assessment Center –School #5, where support and relationships had been established over several years.
The need for teachers to understand the benefits of child-centered practice for all children and to create appropriate incentives for mainstream teachers to seek out training in special education, such as counting such training toward promotion on an equal basis with subject-specific training.	Starting from 2004 the MoES official policy encourages teachers to adopt student-centered pedagogy, which is a central theme in all in-service trainings for teachers, a mandatory procedure for all teachers every five years. However, inclusive and special education are not yet integrated into in-service teacher training. Teachers receive necessary information and professional consultation from the multidisciplinary team of specialists at their schools.
The relationship between the classroom and special education teacher is defined from the beginning although teachers must see their roles as collaborative.	The relationship between the classroom teacher and special educators are defined from the very beginning when the child's learning abilities are assessed and the IEP is formed. The definition of their collaboration highly depends on the level of the child's disability. In case of severe and complex, moderate cases of disability, special educators spend more time with the student than the classroom teacher.

As demonstrated in the table above, we did find that the roles of both classroom and special education teachers were defined from the very beginning, which is associated with more successful models in other research (Gibb, 2007; Forlin, 2010). We also found that there was significant room in the model developed in Armenia for ad hoc support from resource centers in addition to consistent support of classroom teachers from multidisciplinary teams of specialists. This provided a useful element of flexibility for more individual approaches that is also associated with successful resource centers in the international research.

However, we also found that most of the time in the schools that we observed, classroom teachers were working without assistants or with parent-assistants. When parents assisted in the classroom, they were dedicated to a specific child (their own) rather than providing assistance to the class as a whole. The international literature points to the importance of making a transition to paraprofessional assistants who work with the entire class to achieve a truly inclusive environment (Gibb, 2007; Head, 2007; Forlin, 2010). A dedicated assistant leading separate activities with the student with SEN by definition separates her from the rest of the classroom. In addition to challenges with classroom assistants, we also found that availability of training and subsequent implementation of child-centered approaches to teaching were lacking in the schools we observed.

Child-centered approaches are enshrined in education policy documents (National Institute of Education, 2004) in Armenia and are acknowledged in the literature as important in supporting inclusive classrooms; nevertheless, both special educators at inclusive schools and the teachers who participated in focus-group sessions reported that large classes as well as the long practice of teacher-centered approaches create difficulties for some teachers who wanted to incorporate student-centered pedagogy into their teaching praxis. The extent to which teachers were themselves able to meet the needs of students with SEN in all the inclusive schools we visited largely depended on the support of the multidisciplinary team. It is through the team's assistance that teachers form IEPs for the students, learn about the specific needs of every child, and receive methodological support and literature. In two inclusive schools, team members even helped the teachers of physics and chemistry to simplify the daily material for students.

Except for five schools in Yerevan which started inclusive education with a pilot initiative in 2003, all the other inclusive schools in Armenia have received a single week long training introducing inclusive education. The training program covered the basic components of inclusion and pedagogical approaches to help teachers meet the

needs of students with SEN in their classrooms. Thus far, other than this introductory training offered by the National Institute of Education,[4] there are no pre-service or in-service state-organized teacher trainings for inclusive education. During focus-group sessions, special school educators expressed anxiety regarding the insufficient training and preparation of teachers at inclusive schools. The specialists of the assessment center who organize teacher trainings noted that teachers "...cannot fully comprehend the work with these children because they have not gone through trainings. Even when we describe the needs of a child they cannot imagine what it means, they have never worked before with children with these kind needs..." As affirmed by the three special school principals participating in this study, this lack of teacher preparation to serve students with SEN in their classrooms was the primary motivation for them to pursue the training and support programs offered by resource centers.

In the resource center model developed by the three special schools in Armenia, inflexibility of special school staff was not present as a hindering factor. The principals and specialists at the three schools expressed great eagerness to cooperate with inclusive schools and provide the necessary support and supplementary services. The specialists mentioned during the focus group session that "during our visits to inclusive schools we tell them they can come to us with any question, we are ready to help." All three schools have a special group that regularly works on the development of teaching methods, materials, and techniques for the teachers at their schools. They also organize visits to inclusive schools as well as trainings for specialists and teachers. The positive attitudes held by special school staff toward inclusion and support for it was evident. The directors interviewed stated that with the appropriate level of training and exposure, teachers at inclusive schools will be able to provide good education to students with SEN.

Staff at both inclusive and special schools expressed their concerns about the inclusion of children with severe disabilities. The teachers and special team members at inclusive schools mentioned that there should be a threshold level for the disability to be included in general schools; that is, children with severe disabilities and extremely aggressive behavior should not be included. As they noted "organizing the education of these children in a large classroom is not to their benefit. We have to pull out the child all the time and work individually with them, and this is not

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4. At the time of writing this report, the National Institute of Education, the World Bank, and the NGO Bridge of Hope were developing a project with technical assistance from a university in Finland to improve teacher training so that teachers will be better equipped to work in inclusive classrooms (interview, S. Tadevosyan).

inclusive education." They stated that there should be a clear set of distinctions for the parents too, as "the parents have the right to take their child to any school they wish, and sometimes they do not take into account if the education of their child is possible at a regular school."

Special school personnel emphasized this point, too. They stated that children whose educational needs cannot be met at an inclusive school should at least start the primary level at a special school and, after reaching a certain level, transfer to an inclusive school. The specialists of the assessment center who also organize education for children with severe mental deficiencies noticed that "for many of the children with severe disabilities, socialization is all that they learn during their schooling...thus, in their case the focus should not be on complete inclusion and finishing school, but on introduction and socialization to the inclusive school environment." For children with severe hearing impairments, specialists did not consider inclusion as the best option for their education and social inclusion. They pointed out that the inclusion of severely deaf children will lead to their isolation in a classroom where they cannot communicate with peers and the teacher, and will also cut them off from the deaf community and culture. These findings indicate the evolutionary nature of views about inclusive education as a practice as well as how, when, and whether to include children with more complex needs in mainstream schools. Similar debates have been recorded in the literature documenting other countries' experiences making the transition from segregated to inclusive education (Booth, 1987).

The Armenian model of resource center has great potential to develop. Although one of the policymakers pointed out that special schools are still seen as distant and closed institutions by the general public, research participants felt that the three special schools working with the Open Society foundation in Armenia were integral parts of their communities. All interview and focus-group participants noted that these are the schools with the capacities to serve the needs of children with severe and multiple disabilities and they could act as official resource centers as the Assessment Center –School #5 does today. For example, the school for children with hearing impairments has set up a close partnership with one of the participating inclusive schools. They provide auditory assessments for hearing impaired children at the inclusive school. Overall, the teachers and specialists consider the three schools as specialized centers, and as the principal of the general school A (see Table 4 on p. 43) mentioned, they are informed that the country has these special school centers and they turn to them for advice or consultation, even if they do not all have the state recognized status of a resource center.

4.2 Teachers and the School Environment

The school environment built by administrators and teachers is a key enabling factor for inclusive education (Avramidis, 2002). Collaboration between general and special education teachers is very important for successful inclusion (Caron, 2002; Fletcher-Campbell, 2000; Forlin, 2010). Since we were studying the development of a resource center model, we wanted to explore the strategies used for creating an enabling school environment. The academic literature on inclusion discusses a range of strategies from development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Caron, 2002; Blanton, 2011) to informal individual collaboration (Booth, 1987). One positive finding of including special education teachers in planning work with mainstream teachers was that mainstream "teachers" are acquiring greater knowledge about students who struggle in classrooms and special education teachers are making important linkages between the needs of students who have disabilities and the [mainstream] curriculum" (Blanton, 2011).

In the Armenian resource center model, the cooperation is centered on the link between the mainstream teacher and the special school specialist, as well as the mainstream teacher and the mainstream school's multidisciplinary team. The cooperation and exchange of experience between the special school specialists and mainstream teachers is mainly organized during teacher trainings, which are usually initiated by one of the three special schools or certain inclusive school principals. One special school staff member noted that outside of these organized activities, "we don't have cases of teachers, as individuals or groups, coming to us for professional advice." The initial reason for this specific way of cooperation is that mainstream teachers heavily rely on their school's multidisciplinary team's support for consultation, forming IEPs, and simplifying materials, as well as getting professional literature on inclusive education. The nature of this cooperation may change in the future when mainstream teachers gain more experience in working with children with SEN.

During focus group sessions the teachers brought up another reason for not directly contacting special school teachers when in need. "Our students with SEN have mild disabilities," they noted "and we don't have severe problems or crises with them. If there is a special case the classroom teacher, special educator, and a specialist will work collaboratively to solve it." However, when the specialists within the mainstream school cannot deal with particular cases or need additional supervision and assistance, they turn to special school staff. During sessions with the teachers and specialists we found out that there is also cooperation between inclusive schools.

For example, general schools B and C, which are model schools that started inclusive education in 2003, are actively cooperating with other inclusive schools and providing consultations and exchange of experience both in person and on the telephone. Thus, cooperation and collaboration among a range of teachers and specialists is flexible and integral to the model we observed in Armenia.

For teachers who participated in this study, inclusion was revolutionary in terms of instruction and pedagogy. The new instructional theory not only implied that they need to work with SEN children in the same classroom, but that every child has educational needs and requires the creation of special conditions which will discover their learning potential. Accepting and working with this student-centered pedagogy has been a challenge for those teachers who have been educated and worked according to the segregated system and teacher-centered pedagogy for decades. Several of them, as mentioned by multidisciplinary team members, do their work with students with SEN because it is a requirement, but they do not necessarily understand and accept the idea of inclusion. Conversely, young and middle-aged teachers, particularly at the primary level, do not seem overwhelmed with new educational practices and do work toward inclusion voluntarily.

This finding is consistent with other research, which shows that the factors affecting attitudes of teachers (years teaching, previous exposure to children with SEN, grade level) are inconsistent across studies; however, pre-service and in-service training for teachers on working with children with SEN is vital and should be a top priority for policymakers (Avramidis, 2002). Beyond teachers' readiness to develop inclusive classrooms, a review of the literature points out that "significant restructuring in the mainstream school environment should take place before [SEN] students are included," and appropriate external support systems should be in place (Avramidis, 2002). These include additional services to support some learners, including teaching assistants in classrooms, additional learning materials to support different means of learning, on-site or mobile clusters of specialized services like speech therapy, and additional funding to support these services (Pillay, 2009; Rose 2001). Indeed, fear of inadequate support in the future and sharply increased workloads will make teachers hesitant to accept students with SEN in their classrooms (Avramidis, 2002).

The introduction of multidisciplinary teams within the resource center model in Armenia represents one significant step toward restructuring the school environment. However, at the classroom level this restructuring appears to have been more easily achieved at primary schools where students work with one teacher all day than in secondary school where students move among subject teachers at regular intervals. Teachers themselves accepted this fact, stating that "... teachers in primary school

work so well with students with SEN, so that when they reach middle school it is easy for the rest of us to work with them." Large class size[5] and limited time seem to be the biggest barriers for the teachers in the secondary level who participated in our study. This is especially the case for the teachers of foreign languages and oral subjects such as history and geography who meet with the class once or twice a week and have to manage to cover the material delineated by the curriculum.

Several studies find that teachers who see themselves as responsible for the diverse students in their classrooms and take a more environmental approach to disability, thus seeing themselves as capable of supporting children's development and learning, are more likely to implement inclusion programs successfully if provided with appropriate training (Avramidis, 2002; Caron, 2002; Pillay, 2009; Rose, 2001). Teachers interviewed in our study have begun to make this transition. They agree that it "is not right to isolate or segregate a child because of disabilities"; however, they also expressed concern about whether it is pedagogically justifiable to bring a child with severe intellectual disabilities to a regular school and not give them academic knowledge such as basic math like multiplication for four to five years.

They also pointed to a lack of training and support in the classroom, which would help with this transition. Teachers told us that they have difficulties with grading. They do not know what scale they should use for students with SEN. Some children with special needs received in-class assistant support, for example during tests. However, teachers noted that their work would have been more productive if they had a teacher assistant, not only for instructional aid but also such practical assistance as taking the child to the bathroom during the lesson.

The inclusive schools participating in this research do not have teacher assistants on staff. Instead, support for inclusive education is provided by a multidisciplinary team composed of five educators and therapists, including a speech therapist, psychologist, social worker, special educator, and team coordinator. Each team of five specialists is allocated to a community of 56 students with SEN. It is doubled if the school has more students with special education needs. Team members are employed by the inclusive school as a full-time or part-time staff depending on the need and the number of students. In all the schools we visited, these specialists were full-time workers, and they worked with students without SEN, too. The levels of staffing in visited schools are summarized in Table 4.

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5.   The average class size in the inclusive schools visited in Armenia is 27–35 students except for one school which has classes of 39–40 students. The maximum number of students with SEN in regular classrooms is from two to three. Students with SEN in all schools were mainly in primary level.

Table 4. *Staffing at Inclusive Schools*

	Students with SEN	Total number of students at school	Specialists	Total number of teachers at school	Ratio of students with SEN to specialists
High school A	32	427	6	—	5 to 1
High school B	43	428	5	—	8 to 1
High school C	19	—	5*	111	3 to 1
General school A	26	793	5	53	5 to 1
General school B	52	355	5	—	10 to 1
General school C	76	—	14	48	5 to 1
General school D	55	667	5	55	11 to 1

Note: * Two of the specialists were on maternity leave.

Regardless of the difficulties of restructuring the school environment, it is clear that these schools are making a good faith, systematic effort to implement inclusive practices. The education of SEN children is based on IEPs in all the participating schools. The IEP presents evaluation procedures and criteria, learning and/or education objectives, detailed description of the content, and the amount of work done with the child. The IEP is a fundamental document for the child to progress from one grade to another or to transfer to another school. The IEP is formed during a month after the child is admitted to the school in cooperation with the teachers who work with the child, special and social educators as well as the psychologist.

Practices regarding the IEP are influenced by education policy. As detailed in official documents organizing inclusive education (MoES, 2010), students with SEN must participate in at least 80 percent of the lessons established by the time table. When necessary, individual work with students with SEN is organized in a separate resource room; however, this individual support is not to exceed 20 percent of the school day. Some respondents also indicated that schools prefer to remove students from class for additional support with specialists from this team as soon as a challenge arises rather than as a last resort (S. Tadevosyan, interview, October, 2011). Additional lessons prescribed in the IEP are organized after the end of the school day. These lessons are set up in clear time tables and overseen by the coordinator. This is the practice in all the schools visited during this study.

Thus, students with SEN follow the standard curriculum. With the formation of the IEP, the group of specialists and teachers make the necessary adaptations for each

student. It may vary from simplified basic information from the everyday lesson set up by the official curriculum to a complete departure from the standard curriculum, for example, teaching only the alphabet and multiplication. Curriculum differentiation may also include dropping certain subjects such as foreign language or physical education and providing extra work on other subjects or practical areas instead. The principal of general school C mentioned that at their school there were cases when parents voluntarily signed a written agreement so their children take only math and Armenian. These were mostly children with intellectual disabilities when the learning target for the child is the alphabet and numbers.

A critical point of curriculum development for students with SEN is the provision of teaching materials. There is not a specifically identified service to provide differentiated or supportive learning materials. The Assessment Center–School # 5 publishes workbooks, which mainly present simplified general curricula and text-books. During focus groups, teachers noted that these workbooks mainly contain textual information, are quite complex, and are not comprehensive for students with moderate and severe intellectual or learning disabilities. The center also offers ongoing consultation for teachers on forming IEPs, on different instructional tools, and approaches. The School for Children with Hearing Impairment offers professional support to general school C for forming the IEP and learning materials for students with hearing impairments. For other instances, the multidisciplinary team and teachers are left to develop their own teaching and supplementary materials either in collaboration with their colleagues or in isolation.

4.3 Parents: Support and Opposition

The majority of students attending schools participating in our study began first grade at an inclusive school rather than transferring from a special school. Thus, we focused on comparisons in the international literature that looked at school placement rather than the transition from special to mainstream schools for individual children. A review of the relevant literature shows that parental anxiety about the way that a child with SEN will be treated in a mainstream classroom is a barrier to the transition from special to mainstream schools (Gibb, 2007; Head, 2007; Norwich, 2008). However, Norwich (2004) presents evidence suggesting that children attending special schools are actually more likely to be bullied by children in the community.

The parents of students with SEN who attend the special schools participating in this study illustrate these concerns and the difficulty of the education system's

transition to inclusive education. During focus groups, they noted that teachers in special schools are trained in their subject areas and have experience in working with children with disabilities. They have classes as small as seven students. By contrast, teachers at mainstream schools concentrate on accomplishing their annual academic plan with 30 or more students in the classroom. Thus, parents of students with SEN feel that their children receive more attention and more chances for making progress and gaining academic knowledge at special schools. This speaks to the need for restructuring mainstream schools more completely as inclusive environments.

The second concern of the parents of students with SEN we interviewed was isolation of their children among the students in mainstream schools. The Assessment Center–School # 5 works to mitigate this challenge by working with Schools # 43 and # 114 to include children with autism and intellectual disabilities into activities so that they gradually become familiar with the school before they enroll as pupils (L. Geghamyan, personal correspondence, April 2012). The parents of children attending the special school for hearing impairments were very passionate about this point. During their focus group session they said that their children would be cut off from their culture and environment and would be seen as incomplete people due to their lack of verbal speech, whereas among their deaf peers they feel complete. These parents were not very positive about transferring their children to inclusive schools. However, they said if inclusive schools have full-time specialist support and smaller class sizes like in the special school they may consider the option of transferring. In the latter case, they also emphasized that the classroom teacher must know basic sign language. And sign language should be also taught to other children as well, so that their children get the opportunity to communicate with the class.

In addition to the concerns of parents of children with disabilities about inclusion, studies show that parents of children studying in their catchment area's general school may be concerned that inclusion of students with SEN would take the teacher's time from their own child; this concern may be exacerbated by the use of testing and league tables as the major measures of school success (Rose, 2001). In all seven schools participating in this review, opposition from parents of non-disabled students was voiced in the beginning when the school became inclusive. A couple of parents overtly expressed their displeasure to principals. One parent transferred his child to a private school. Principals, the school psychologist, and social workers responded by holding special explanatory meetings with parents. All principals stated that the most important thing in dealing with these parents was providing a comprehensible way of explaining inclusion in order to avoid spreading misinformation. However, all the

principals, specialists, and teachers affirmed that they noticed and heard opposition from parents only during the first two years. The three special schools did not provide support for this process, although parents of children in inclusive schools sometimes approach them for advice.

By contrast, students have been a consistently positive and supportive link in inclusive education. Many primary teachers stated during focus groups that parents who opposed inclusion soon changed their position upon seeing the friendly and helpful attitude of their own children. They voluntarily offer help to their peers, either explaining the lesson or accompanying them during the break. Friendship and love for friends are highly promoted ideas at schools. During the visits teachers showed the poems, essays or school newspapers that students wrote about their SEN friends. In high school C, the psychologists set up a volunteer club with high school students who help students with SEN to do their lessons and spend time with them.

Parent involvement in the education of SEN children may present special challenges in developing and transition contexts. However, visits to all seven schools in Yerevan demonstrated that cooperation among parents, teachers, and specialists is considered a key factor in inclusive education. The specialists in seven schools stated that they highly encourage parental involvement in the education of the children and the accomplishment of the learning goals. Parents are invited to periodic meetings to discuss their children's IEP, although the participation of parents and students with SEN into the formation of the IEP was not the accepted practice in the schools participating in this study.

There are parents of students with SEN who stay in the school during the day and assist teachers by taking their children to the bathroom or feeding them during lunch. This was the case with high school A where all parents stayed at school, and high school B and general school C, where more than 50 percent of SEN student parents stayed at school. These parents act as volunteer teaching assistants, although rather than supporting the class as a whole, they are attached to their child to compensate for their disability.

Arevik is in the 3rd grade at high school B.[6] Her mother has been attending school with her since she began first grade. Arevik has a spinal cord disability and cannot walk; she also has mild intellectual disabilities. When she started first grade, Arevik

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6.   The names of all children have been changed to protect their identity. School names have been changed consistently for the same purpose.

cried and refused to stay alone in the classroom. Later on assistance provided by her mother, such as helping Arevik move to the board, go to the bathroom, and providing in-class extra support and guidance when the teacher explained a new lesson to the class became irreplaceable. The teacher and other students as well as their parents accepted Arevik's mother's presence very calmly and naturally.

In addition to using parents as volunteer assistants, all seven schools set up parent meetings on a monthly basis. Multidisciplinary teams carry out individual work with the parents of all students with SEN in every school. All school principals stated that they invite parents to the lessons to see how classroom activities and the teaching/learning process are organized. Specialists at general schools A, C and D include non-students with SEN into meetings and discussions raising the awareness of all school parents and spreading needed information through them to the community.

The case studies in the countries of Central and South Asia show that the stigma associated with disability as well as limited educational opportunities can conspire to keep students with SEN out of school altogether (Ahsan, 2007; OECD, 2009). The specialists interviewed for this review noted that the lack of awareness and stigma associated with disability in society is very high. Parents are afraid to find out that their children need special conditions for education and are ashamed of what neighbors and relatives might think. This is particularly the case in regions where parents refuse to take their children to assessment or hide their children with disabilities at home and never take them to school.

Parents whose children's special education needs are discovered later may refuse to believe that their children need special support. The interaction with parents whose children's needs have been discovered by teachers or the multidisciplinary team is difficult. This was the case with all seven schools as described by the special team members and principals. In some cases, parents may completely refuse to take their children to the Assessment Center–School # 5 or let them be assessed at school. Even visiting the psychologist is an issue for some parents. They think of the psychologist as a psychotherapist and that visiting this specialist would label the child as "mad" or an "imbecile."

The principal of the high school C described the case of a child with extremely aggressive behavior. The principal wanted to provide him with several sessions with the school psychologist, as it had become impossible for the teachers to work with him in the classroom and the boy was suffering. Schools in Armenia cannot assign any

extra classes or sessions to a child without the parents' agreement. When the principal informed the father of this child, he became very upset and angry saying that his son is not 'mad' and does not need a psychiatrist. The psychologist explained that the session would consist only of conversations accompanied by short exercises of drawing or writing which would help them understand the child and his behavior. In the end the father agreed, but it took a lot of explanation and effort from them to get this agreement.

The schools in Armenia participating in this study understand that they must develop a partnership with parents to support them in overcoming the stigma associated with disability. This is an important positive step toward inclusion.

4.4 Factors relevant to developing and transition countries: The policy environment

As discussed earlier, the Armenian system of special education was established during the Soviet era and was heavily influenced by the defectology approach. Children with special educational needs usually attended special schools (Gibson, 1980; Anderson, Silver, and Velkoff, 1987). Armenia maintained this dual system of education after its declaration of independence but has been working toward a more inclusive system since ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010.

Some studies have found that teachers in countries with the best-developed systems of segregated education provision were less supportive of inclusion (Avramidis, 2002). This is a particularly important consideration in countries of the former Soviet Union because the segregated system of special schools, which includes a significant number of boarding schools, is well-developed. The staff working within this system are often opponents of inclusion because they see their own institutions as protective of children and better-equipped to serve their needs. They may also fear changes that may make their institutions obsolete as in the case of the School for the Blind in Armenia whose director steadfastly refuses to participate in any support for inclusion, even for visually impaired children not already served by the school (S. Tadevosyan, interview, October, 2011). Although there are some staff who fear losing their jobs, education specialists note that many boarding school staff also realize "...that their train has gone in staying as segregated schools, and [staff] try to adapt and utilize their roles in a new way" (L. Geghamyan, personal correspondence, April, 2012).

The findings of this research show that the cooperation of schools, certain officials, and supporting organizations affected the education environment and diffused the knowledge of inclusive education and how to organize it. The Law of Education passed on April 14, 1999, was a significant step in education policy reforms initiated in Armenia after an eight-year systemic and funding crisis following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The law stated that parents have the right to enroll their children in any school they choose (Article 28, point 41). Furthermore, it established that the parents of children with special educational needs have the choice of either enrolling their children in mainstream or special schools (Article 19, point3).

Based on the education law the first pilot project of inclusive education was started in Yerevan in 1999 in one school. The project was enlarged in 2003 and involved four more schools. This cooperation has been instrumental in constructing inclusion as a national policy. The Republic of Armenia adopted the Law on Education of Children with Special Conditions in 2005, establishing inclusive education as the primary means for the education of children with SEN, and defining the provision of specialized educational services based on child-centered pedagogy. The country already had two years of experience with inclusive education from the initiative of active promoters of inclusivity at model schools; however, the systemic transition has not been completely fluid. There is a great need for resource mobilization, teacher and parent training, and development of specific teaching materials.

The 1999 education law also forced officials, education organizers, and society at large to focus on the education of children with disabilities, and revealed that both the education system and society had done little or nothing for these children except isolate them from society (MoES staff, personal communication, March 8, 2012). The law gave legitimacy to the inclusive educational practices started in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The model of inclusive education in Armenia was based on the experience of five pilot schools in Yerevan that welcomed all requests of experience and resource exchange.

The Law on Public Education established in 2009 took the concept and experience of inclusive education to a more solid ground. It stated a new way of perceiving and organizing education. It gave independence to schools from centralized regional governance. Thus, it became a priority for a school to be able to serve the educational needs of every child living in the community. Another important fact that the 2009 law stated for inclusive education was universal criteria and the need to establish only one state standard to assess the educational needs of all children. Following the 2009 law, inclusive education programs have been implemented

through active collaboration with UNICEF, World Vision, Mission East International, Bridge of Hope, and national organizations.

The scaling up of inclusive education policy to allow for widespread services and supportive inclusive environments is an ongoing process. On February 9, 2012, the government approved a new Law on Education and passed it to the National Assembly for adoption. The new law would adopt inclusive education as a system-wide reform and include the transformation of special schools into resource centers. The law also supposes the elimination of negative marks and grade retention to give the teachers the possibility to assess students based on their knowledge and ability to acquire the material. This change will give students the possibility to study with their peers regardless of their academic knowledge and learning abilities. Given the parliamentary elections in May 2012, the discussions of the law have been postponed to the autumn 2012 session.

This significant policy development cannot be directly attributed to the work of the three special schools working with the Open Society foundation in Armenia. There are many organizations advocating for inclusive practices, including Bridge of Hope, Mission East, UNICEF, and World Vision. However, policymakers in the Ministry of Education and Science as well as stakeholders in the NGO and international organization community are aware of the services that these three schools, particularly Assessment Center–School #5, provide. In addition, in 2009 the Open Society foundation in Armenia and UNICEF provided funding to Bridge of Hope to "present an innovative, replicable and advanced model for special schools based on best practices and lessons learnt from special educational reforms in East East countries[7] and thus contribute to the reform of the special education sector in Armenia" (Special Education Project Summary, Open Society foundation Armenia, 2009).

By offering a nationwide inclusive education system, the law presupposes either closing or transforming special schools into resource centers. The makers and promoters of the law have a clear account that teacher and specialist preparation for inclusive schools have lagged behind the policy and practice implementation, and there is an urgent need of specialist-teacher assistants for students with hearing and other severe impairments.

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7. East East: Partnerships without Boarders is a program of the Open Society Foundations that provides funding for exchange of experience between and among countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. See http://www.soros.org/initiatives/east for more information.

However, as one of the authors of the law stated during the interview, the model of resource centers should be thought out carefully. One respondent suggested that if these centers have a full-time student community and receive funding for each student they will be motivated to have more students. She also felt that they could be a starting point for children with disabilities to receive primary education in preparation for inclusive education, offering the services of specialists who can be hired by schools based on the needs of their students with SEN (MoES staff, interview, October, 2011). In practice, it would be better for children to start school in an inclusive school with appropriate support rather than transferring from a segregated environment to an inclusive school later on (Norwich, 2004). Her point that these reforms require careful planning is well-taken.

Transferring the model of special school as resource center can be reasonably effective with the potential to work well when there is flexibility to develop "alternative approaches that more closely reflect local cultures" rather than simply borrowing a model directly from another education system (Forlin, 2010). The steps of special schools toward becoming resource centers will be considered if the law on resource centers is ratified. It is expected that there would be a 10-year period to synthesize and coordinate the countrywide function of an inclusive system with resource centers. This process would be accompanied by the establishment of awareness raising mechanisms to explain inclusive education to the larger society and to inform parents that they can place their children in any school and that schools are required to use resource centers to meet the needs of their children.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study found that acceptance of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools and respecting their right to be among their peers was clearly expressed by special and inclusive school principals and personnel participating in this study. During interviews and focus-groups, all participants emphasized that inclusive education is "humanistic education" and "we could not work and live with segregated systems any longer." All of them clearly expressed that inclusion should be the union of two systems where the value and the strengths of both are balanced, where the democratic and humanistic approach of an inclusive system and the specialized targeted approach of special education complement work in mainstream classrooms. It is clear that the work of the Open Society foundation in Armenia, in collaboration with other donors and NGOs, has moved discussions of both policy and practice toward greater inclusion in a very significant way.

However, inclusion is not only an idea, it is a practice. Policymakers, school principals, and parents all expressed uncertainty regarding the philosophy and pedagogy based on the assessment of general and special educators that mainstream teachers may have insufficient training and preparation for teaching inclusive classes. Staff at special schools were supportive of having students develop their skills and knowledge at inclusive schools. Yet they remain concerned that inclusive school teachers do not have experience and "are completely uninformed about the needs of different children with SEN and how to work with them." These concerns are based on their visits and lesson observations, as well as questions raised by teacher-trainees during the trainings. They highlighted that inclusive school teachers need to develop a beneficial methodology and bring creativity into their instruction and classroom management. They noticed that large class size does sometimes limit the teachers' chances to give as much attention to students with SEN as needed.

Specialists at the school for children with hearing disabilities also raised the question of the deaf community and culture and the need for severely deaf children not to feel isolated in a classroom of 35 hearing children. They emphasized that teachers need to have basic knowledge of sign language so that children can communicate with them; also, schools need to have sign language interpreter(s) so that deaf children take all subjects and participate in all lessons and "get the chance to finish the school as a whole citizen like other children."

These concerns point to the need for more support for classroom teachers in inclusive schools. Overall, staff at special schools had a very positive attitude toward inclusion, but were also very cognizant of the challenges ahead. They stated that with appropriate levels of training and experience, teachers at inclusive schools will be able to provide good education to students with SEN. They also mentioned that inclusive teachers and specialists need to know that special schools are resources for knowledge and experience and are open for help and assistance.

The principals of all seven mainstream schools were also supportive of inclusive education. Two of them were model schools in the 2003–05 pilots of inclusive education and now they see themselves as the advocates of inclusion. The other three have had partnerships with Bridge of Hope and took part in small-scale awareness raising seminars and cooperative projects. One of these schools also had a special program with the Assessment Center–School #5, before it was recognized as such. The other two principals learned about inclusion after the law in 2005. They studied the program and observed it at model schools before becoming active supporters of inclusion. In all of these cases, the opportunity to observe and build experience before jumping in with both feet has been invaluable. By working in partnership with schools rather than trying to impose reform from above, the process becomes much more sustainable.

Furthermore, exposure to inclusive education practices has given schools the tools to deal with challenges that they have faced all along. All principals affirmed that their decision was based on the fact that they have always had children with special needs or mild disabilities who were not officially categorized as such and were accepted to school for various reasons, such as requests by parents to not take the child to a special school located in a district far away or separate them from a sibling attending the same school. All seven principals expressed great devotion for inclusion and a high level of readiness to support their staff and seize every opportunity of training and seminar programs. As the initiators of official inclusion at their schools, principals initially had to deal with a certain degree of opposition from teachers and

the parents of general students. They dealt with these constituencies and concerns through group meetings and discussion. They also faced disapproving attitudes from non-inclusive school principals as well as lack of acceptance by the community where the school is located. Over time, the principals' work has had positive results that have helped gain acceptance for inclusion and spread inclusive practices throughout the country.

It is worth noting that special team members pointed out all the methodological boundaries that teachers face. These corresponded exactly to the ideas and concerns expressed by the teachers although their focus groups were separate. These complementary results point to the beginnings of team teaching, although this practice could be emphasized more strongly in the future.

The issues of practice and methodology as well as the inclusion of severely disabled children raised by the specialists and teachers were discussed with the policy-makers. One of them disagreed with the idea of having state-defined levels of disability for inclusion. "If we do, we won't be able to control the process. Schools will accept only easy children and mild levels of disability." As it stands, schools are required to admit students with SEN of all levels unless they can convince the ministry and arrive to an agreement that attending an inclusive school is not in the child's best interest. These findings recognize that inclusion is a continuum with intermediate steps and challenges that must be addressed. The people who participated in our research have taken several important steps toward greater inclusion and were honest about the challenges that they see ahead.

Beyond the conclusions our respondents drew about inclusive education in Armenia, this study began as an effort to evaluate the Armenia foundation's project to develop three special schools for children with disabilities as resource centers for inclusive education in mainstream schools. We had hoped to assess the progress of the project to date and to provide recommendations for the foundation about how to take the project forward to promote the cause of inclusive education in Armenia, and perhaps, the post-Soviet region. This remains an important part of our research, and a discussion of the trends that we observed in the interaction between the special and mainstream schools, as well as a section of recommendations, are included throughout this report. However, we also observed an interesting phenomenon that merits discussion.

Most projects submitted for evaluation have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. They are planned in their entirety from the beginning with budgets, activity plans, and indicators of success against which project outcomes can be compared with

relative ease. As we dug into the details of this project, we did not find many of these typical planning documents. In interviewing staff from the Open Society foundation in Armenia, we sought out two former staff members to attempt to identify the true beginning of the project. In the end, this proved impossible because the "project" was an integral part of the Armenia foundation's education strategy. It grew naturally from existing partnerships with schools and a growing interest from the foundation's board and staff in the rights of people with disabilities.

This made the project much more difficult to evaluate because it lacked the structure of most projects and thus defied attempts to fit it into a standard evaluation framework. However, it is also a tremendous strength because the natural evolution of the idea (which is not unique to Armenia) from existing partnerships and ongoing conversations meant that the beneficiaries, composed of participating schools, felt that they had generated the idea of working together and viewed the foundation as a partner rather than a donor. In more traditional projects, the best intentions often fall victim to donor requirements for standardization and planning. Striking a balance between the need to plan funding and set priorities and the need to ensure ownership is very difficult. The foundation in Armenia has done this admirably through ongoing discussions of its emerging priorities with existing partners and by firmly rooting its education strategy in the frameworks of community participation and human rights.

When asked what has made the foundation's work in inclusive education successful, staff responded that working in a spirit of consultation and respect for the professional expertise of others, even when they don't necessarily agree, is the key to success. Speaking about inclusive education and mainstreaming, Armine Tadevosian said, "I thought that they [the special schools] should tell us how to get there." When asked what recommendations she had for other foundations that might want to adopt the special schools as resource centers model, she said that they should:

- Think about the groundwork they have already laid through previous programs;

- Find the professionals who want to make changes (even if they're not the changes you think you want) and figure out what you can learn from each other; and

- Talk with other groups and figure out ways to work together in order to convince officials and various ministries about the benefits of policy change.

As the Open Society foundation in Armenia takes its work forward, we hope that they will maintain the strong partnerships that they have built and continue to

support work with teachers, parents, and communities. It will also be important to continue to provide professional development opportunities for the staff of the special schools as they continue to act as resources for others.

Recommendations for policy and practice

The following suggestions for policy and practice can help focus the Armenia foundation's future work and strategy development. They may also be useful for other donors, NGOs, or agencies working to advance inclusive education in Armenia and beyond.

- **Continue to support special school staff with professional development to promote inclusion**

  It is clear that the transition from special school to resource center is a long process that requires completely reframing the way that educators look at schools. As resources for inclusion, it is up to the special schools and the multidisciplinary teams at inclusive schools to promote inclusion through concrete changes in the learning environment and teaching practice. Reforms need to be based on questions that ask how schools can adapt to children's needs by removing barriers to full participation rather than focusing on ways that children can overcome barriers to fit into current, traditional classrooms. This shift in thinking requires a great deal of ongoing professional development and exposure to innovative programs and practices through workshops, professional literature, and mentoring support from other experienced teachers. This last element is critically important as teachers strive to change their classroom practice and staff from special schools strive to become mentors themselves. Professional development that includes practical elements like job shadowing, coaching, and review of specific cases is an essential complement to workshops and study tours.

- **Support special school–resource centers in publicizing their support services**

  The findings of the study revealed that special schools do not advertise the full range of support services that they could provide. During the focus group sessions the teachers and multidisciplinary team members mentioned that they tend to only consult with or seek advice from special schools when dealing

with children with complex SEN. There were also groups noting that they do not need the help of special schools as they have only children with "mild disabilities." This means, the teachers and special educators still have the idea that education and pedagogy at special schools deal with extreme cases and do not consider that the experience and knowledge of special schools can assist their practice with other students. One route to changing these attitudes is by organizing open door days for all inclusive school teachers and special team members, during which attendees can see all the books, teaching materials, plans, and syllabi that special schools have developed and observe lessons to see how special school teachers and specialists work with children. This event can be organized more than once during a semester to prevent overcrowding and give more time to inclusive and special school specialists for interaction. An alternative suggestion would be organizing one-day seminars at inclusive schools that present the materials and services that they are ready to provide.

- **Special Schools could offer support for the assessment of students with SEN as new rules begin to take effect**

   Through the focus group sessions with inclusive school teachers, the assessment emerged as a problematic component in organizing the education of students with SEN. Teachers struggle with the scales and grades that they should assign to students with SEN and how it compares with the grades of other students. One way of addressing this is for special schools to step in and provide methodological support sessions to schools that can help organize internal assessments for students with SEN until they reach the level where they have to take school leaving examinations. Given their work experience, specialists at special schools should also officially offer their support to the NIE to develop tests for students with SEN. This would give special schools the opportunity to coordinate and homogenize their consultation through the development and formation of the tests.

- **Support the development of Professional Learning Communities and collaboration among teachers at inclusive schools**

   Our observations and interviews revealed that there are significant opportunities to increase collaboration between the multidisciplinary teams and classroom teachers at inclusive schools. Experts expressed concern that a teacher's first reaction when a student with SEN presents a challenge is to arrange for

services outside the classroom. Greater collaboration would support the goal of identifying modifications or supportive classroom practices that would make separate services the last resort rather than the first. This would also answer some teachers' concerns about training and professional development. However, PLCs must be supported by the school administration (and education policy) with sufficient time and incentives for collaboration.

- **Advocate for the incorporation of paid teaching assistants in the classroom**

  Many of the teachers who participated in this review brought up the need for assistance in inclusive classrooms with more than 20 students. In the cases where we did observe assistants in the classroom, they were parents supporting their own children without pay. It is very positive that classrooms are open to parents, and they should be included in developing their children's educational plans. However, our review of the literature indicates that classroom assistants are more effective when they are supporting the class as a whole rather than attached to a single student. This also implies a modification of teaching practice for the classroom as a whole, which would be more inclusive by definition than offering consistently separate support for a single student.

- **Maintain the links between inclusive education and the rest of the foundation's education strategy**

  One of the greatest strengths of the resource center "project" is the way that it grew naturally from the Open Society foundation in Armenia's inclusive approach to special schools in its education programming over the past 10 years rather than from a conscious shift to "work on inclusive education." While focusing on the specific challenges of inclusion is vital for moving policy and practice forward, the ultimate goal of inclusive education is to change the focus from a specific beneficiary group to a mainstream environment that is welcoming and equipped to work with all children. In that way, inclusion becomes a component of education quality that is relevant to all the foundation's education work. This is exactly where the foundation started when special schools were invited to participate in education programs based on their needs and interests just like the rest of the schools in the country. It would be a shame if a more refined focus on inclusion obscured these wonderfully inclusive beginnings and the unknown opportunities they may still hold.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Questions

(1)   What is a mainstream reform context within which inclusive education initiatives are implemented in Armenia? How supportive are different stakeholders about inclusive education policy and practice?

- What are specific support mechanisms for inclusive education? What is the degree of cooperation between different stakeholders on the national and local level? Are the policy implementers informed about the resource center model? Do they support it?

(2)   What does it mean in practical terms for a special school to act as a resource center for inclusion? What do different stakeholders perceive as most/least valuable in terms of activities, resources, and experiences provided by these centers?

- What type and amount of training or other preparation did teachers from the special schools receive? How do they structure their work with inclusive mainstream schools? How had the special school changed work schedules and distribution of duties to allow staff the time necessary to support inclusive classes?

- How does the curriculum used in the special schools compare to the mainstream curriculum? If there are significant differences, what preparation or additional work is needed before a student moves from the special school to an inclusive mainstream school?

- How did the attitudes of the special schools' directors and staff change as the project progressed?

- Are there any financial implications of the inclusion?

(3)   What changes have taken place in the inclusive mainstream schools to support children with disabilities? What do different stakeholders perceive as most/least valuable?

- How does the project address the issues of inclusivity in terms of general school teachers, students and parents? What kind of preparation activities and trainings were organized to ensure receptivity from general school teachers, students and parents?

- How much time do teachers spend with their mentors from the special schools and how is this time structured?

- What additional support services, such as sign language interpretation, formation of individual study plans, educational materials do the special schools provide?

- How have the attitudes of children in inclusive mainstream schools changed as a result of adding children with disabilities to their class? What concerns or support did parents of children attending the mainstream school express about inclusion and how has their outlook changed?

Appendix 2: Sampling Framework

	Orgs	Directors/ Sr. Staff	Teachers	Specialists	Parents w Child w SEN	Students of State Pedagogical University	Students	Students w SEN
Method		Interview	Focus group	Focus group	Focus group	Focus group (5 per group)	Focus group	Focus group
Special Schools	3	3	0	12	29	34	0	8
Inclusive Schools	7	7	44	26	15	0	59	4
State Agencies	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Project staff and NGOs	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Participants	17	16	44	38	44	34	59	12
Total Events	N/A	16	5	9	6	2	3	3

Appendix 3: Evaluation Instruments

Interview Questions:
Project Staff at the Open Society foundation in Armenia (2 hours)

Please describe the goals of the project as a whole.
What made you decide that this project was a priority for supporting inclusive education in Armenia?

School Selection

- How did you recruit the special schools to participate? What challenges did you face recruiting these schools?

- Did you play a role in selecting the mainstream schools to participate in the project?

Technical Support

- Did you play a role in designing teacher training and other technical support to the project?

- If so, what other technical support was provided?

- Did you work with NGO partners to provide technical support? If so, can you provide the project documents? What did they do?

- How would you rate the effectiveness of technical support? What are your plans for this type of support in the future?

Resource Center Model

- The goal of this project is to make special schools serve as resource centers for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. What do you feel are the major accomplishments of the special schools as resource centers to date?

- What challenges do the special schools face? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- How did the attitudes of the special schools' directors and staff change as the project progressed?

- What challenges do the general education schools face? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- Do you feel that this model has potential for scaling up in Armenia? If so, have you done any projections of the cost for nationwide implementation?

Political Support

- Do you feel that there is political support for the project?

- What have you done to secure political support or advocate for the special schools as a resource center model?

- Have you encountered resistance to this model from any particular group or agency? If so, how did the resistance become apparent and how did you confront it?

Interview Questions for NGO partners (Bridge of Hope) (60 min)

Support for Inclusion

- How would you describe the level of cooperation among different agencies that serve children, like the Ministries of Education and Health?

- At the national level? At the local level?

- Do you think that there are support services available outside schools that help inclusive education? If so, what are they?

- What is the distribution of professional resources for inclusive education throughout the country? How many inclusive schools are in each administrative district of Armenia? How many mainstream schools total are in each administrative district?

- How does the curriculum used in the special schools compare to the mainstream curriculum? If there are significant differences, what preparation or additional work is needed before a student moves from the special school to an inclusive mainstream school?

- Do you feel that there is political support for the project?

- Have you encountered resistance to this model from any particular group or agency? If so, how did the resistance become apparent and how did you confront it?

Special Schools as Resource Centers for Inclusion

- The effect of this project is to make special schools serve as resource centers for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. What do you feel are the major accomplishments of the special schools as resource centers to date?

- To what extent are staff at special schools able to both provide services for children and provide training or collaborative support to other teachers?

- Is there any training program to support this?

- What challenges do the special schools face in this model? Do you think that some special schools might be more prepared than others to participate in such a project? If so, why? What are the determining factors? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- How did the attitudes of the special schools' directors and staff change as the project progressed?

- What challenges do the general education schools face? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- Do you feel that this model has potential for scaling up in Armenia? If so, have you done any projections of the cost for nationwide implementation?

Technical Support

- Did you play a role in selecting schools to participate in the project? What do you think are the most important factors in selecting special and general education schools to participate?

- Did you play a role in designing teacher training and other technical support to the project? If so, what other technical support was provided?

Assessment of Schools

- Do you feel that the schools work to foster a sense of collaboration and shared team responsibility among participating teachers?

- What are some of the challenges that teachers have faced in making their classrooms inclusive?

- How have the challenges that teachers face changed over time?

- Have you encouraged schools to work with parents to build support for inclusion? If so, how have you helped or what have you advised? What seemed to work best?

- What additional support do you think that schools would find useful for inclusive education programs?

Interview Questions for Policymakers
(Ministry of Education, PMPC, local education authority) (30 min)

How would you describe the way that the Concept on Inclusive Education has influenced education reform in Armenia?

Professional Capacity

- What changes have taken place in the pre-service teacher training system as a result of the adoption of the 2005 Concept on Inclusive Education?

- What changes have taken place in the in-service teacher training system as a result of the adoption of the 2005 Concept on Inclusive Education?

- What is the distribution of professional resources for inclusive education throughout the country? How many inclusive schools are in each administrative district (mars)? How many mainstream schools total are in each administrative district (mars)?

Project Specific Questions

- Are you aware of the project funded by the Open Society foundation in Armenia to help three special schools become resource centers for inclusion?

- If you are aware, what is your opinion of the project?

- How could it improve? Are there any additional activities that you suggest? Are there any activities that may benefit other schools?

Use of Special Schools as Resource Centers for Inclusion

- The goal of this project is to make special schools serve as resource centers for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. What do you feel are the major accomplishments of the special schools as resource centers to date?

- To what extent are staff at special schools able to both provide services for children and provide training or collaborative support to other teachers?

- Is there any training program to support this?

- What challenges do the special schools face in this model? Do you think that some special schools might be more prepared than others to participate in such a project? If so, why? What are the determining factors?

- What challenges do the general education schools face in this model?

- Do you feel that this model has potential for scaling up in Armenia? If so, have you done any projections of the cost for nationwide implementation?

Other Support for Inclusion

- How would you describe the level of cooperation among different agencies that serve children, like the Ministries of Education and Health?

- At the national level?

- At the local level?

- Do you think that there are support services available outside schools that help inclusive education? If so, what are they?

- How does the curriculum used in the special schools compare to the mainstream curriculum? If there are significant differences, what preparation or additional work is needed before a student moves from the special school to an inclusive mainstream school?

Interview Questions: Special School Directors

Please describe the goals of the project as a whole.
What made you decide that this project was a priority for supporting inclusive education in Armenia?

School Selection

- Did you play a role in selecting the mainstream schools to participate in the project?

- If so, how did you recruit the mainstream schools to participate? What challenges did you face recruiting these schools?

Technical Support

- Did you play a role in designing teacher training and other technical support for the project?

- If so, please describe the teacher training. What other technical support was provided?

- Did you work with NGO partners to provide technical support? If so, can you provide the project documents? What did they do?

- How would you rate the effectiveness of technical support? What are your plans for this type of support in the future?

- Please provide any teacher training modules or other documents that relate to technical support.

Resource Center Model

- The effect of this project is to make special schools serve as resource centers for inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. What do you feel are your major accomplishments as resource centers to date?

- What challenges do you face? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- How has your idea of inclusion changed as the project progressed?

- What new duties/challenges do you think that your staff faces through this project? What does this mean for their workload?

- Do you see any shifts in the job responsibilities of your staff over the long term as a result of the project?

- What challenges do the general education schools face? How do these challenges inform or influence the project?

- Do you feel that this model has potential for scaling up in Armenia? If so, have you done any projections of the cost for nationwide implementation?

Political Support

- Do you feel that there is political support for the project?

- What have you done to secure political support or advocate for the special schools as resource center model?

- Have you encountered resistance to this model from any particular group or agency? If so, how did the resistance become apparent and how did you confront it?

Focus-group Session Questions for Students with SEN at Inclusive Schools

1) What do you like about your new school and class? What don't you like about your new school and class?

2) What did you like about your previous school and class? What didn't you like about your previous school and class?

3) Do you like your new teachers and friends? How would you describe them? Is there something that you don't like about them?

4) Do you want to return to your previous school? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Focus-group Session Questions for Other Students at Inclusive Schools

1) Do you have peers with SEN in your classroom? How can you describe them? Is there something that you like about them? Is there something that you don't like about them?

2) Do you like being with them in the same classroom? Are they different from your other peers? If yes, describe how.

3) Are you friends with them? If yes, why? If no, why not?

4) Would you like to have more SEN peers in your classroom? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Focus-group Session Questions for Students at Special Schools

1) What do you like about your school and class? What don't you like about your school and class?

2) Do you like your teachers and friends? How would you describe them? Is there something that you don't like about them?

3) Is there something that you want to change in your school and/or class?

4) Do you want to change your school and go to a mainstream school? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Focus-group Session Questions for the Parents of Students at Inclusive Schools

1) What do you know about inclusive education? How would you define or describe it?

2) Does a SEN student have special needs and characteristics that his/her peers do not share? What are those? How do these needs and characteristics affect the teaching and learning processes of a classroom?

3) Do you think that the inclusion of a SEN student into the classroom where your child is would have a negative effect on the smooth working of the classroom? If yes, explain how. If no, why?

4) Does your child have SEN peers in his/her classroom? What kind of attitude does he/she have toward those peers? To what degree, do you think, is your child's attitude affected by your own approach?

5) What do you think the school has to do to smooth the inclusion of SEN students into general classrooms?

6) Do you have any further thoughts and concerns that you think might be useful for the purposes of this study?

Focus-group Session Questions for the Parents of Students with SEN

1) How does inclusive education serve or fail to serve the special education needs of your child? Do you have a child studying at an inclusive school? If yes, how would you evaluate his/her education at an inclusive school compared with a special school?

2) Do you prefer to send your children to an inclusive school or to a special school? Explain your choice.

3) Do you think that teachers at general schools possess the necessary knowledge to effectively teach SEN students? What do you think needs to be done in order to smooth the transition of children from special schools to inclusive schools?

4) How do you evaluate the professional and supportive services of the special school/s? Do you have any suggestions regarding their services or inclusive education in general?

5) Do you have any further thoughts and concerns that you think might be useful for the purposes of this study?

Focus-group Session Questions for the Teachers at Inclusive Schools

Knowledge of policies and procedures

1) What do you know about the Republic of Armenia's policies regarding inclusive education? Do you think it can be successfully implemented in Armenia? If yes, explain how. If no, explain why not.

Understanding inclusion

2) What is inclusive education for you? How do you define or describe it?

Training and resources

3) Do you think you have adequate knowledge and training to be able to teach SEN students in your classroom? Have you received all necessary instructional resources and opportunities to observe other teachers and classrooms with SEN students?

Instruction

4) How do you modify the instruction, curriculum, and materials for SEN students in your classroom? What additional support do you need for organizing the classroom instruction more effectively?

Classroom dynamics

5) According to you, what are the challenges for general school teachers who have SEN students in their classroom?

Cooperation and collaboration with colleagues

6) Have you received professional support and/or preparation from one of special schools? How would you evaluate their services? What would you change or maintain in their approach?

7) Do you have any further thoughts and concerns that you think might be useful for the purposes of this study?

Focus-group Session Questions for the Specialists at Special Schools

Knowledge of policies and procedures

1) What do you know about the Republic of Armenia's policies regarding inclusive education? Do you think it can be successfully implemented in Armenia? If yes, explain how. If no, explain why not.

Understanding inclusion

2) What is inclusive education for you? How do you define or describe it?

Training, resources and instruction

3) Do you have necessary instructional materials that general school teachers can use? What additional support do you think they need for organizing the classroom instruction more effectively?

Classroom dynamics

4) According to you, what are the challenges for general school teachers to have SEN students in their classroom? How effectively could those challenges be eliminated?

Cooperation and collaboration with colleagues

5) Have you ever mentored a general school teacher? Are you willing to share your knowledge, skills, and experiences of working with SEN students with them?

6) Do you have any further thoughts and concerns that you think might be useful for the purposes of this study?

Focus-group Session Questions for the Students of Yerevan State Pedagogical University

1) What is inclusive education for you? How do you define or describe it? Do you think inclusive education can be successfully implemented in Armenia? If yes, explain how? If no, explain why not.

2) Are you going to pursue a career as a teacher after your studies? If yes, how important do you think it is for a teacher to have knowledge and skills for teaching SEN students? Will you work at an inclusive school? If yes, why? If no, why not?

3) Are you being introduced to all necessary instructional resources and materials for teaching SEN students? Do you have the opportunities of classroom observations and teaching with mentors?

4) How would you evaluate the level of knowledge and training that you receive from the special school?

5) Do you have any further thoughts and concerns that you think might be useful for the purposes of this study?

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