Parental Advocacy:

Supporting Indian Parents to be Effective Advocates for Education of their Children with Special Needs

by

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MASTERS OF EDUCATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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We accept this Project as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract
Parents play a critical role in making decisions concerning effective educational services for their children with disabilities. Therefore, parental advocacy is a critical form of involvement by parents. Studies have classified forms of parental advocacy; however, these definitions are limited in terms of communicating the components necessary for effective advocacy. The terminology is quite widespread in developed countries such as Canada and America, but countries—like India—lack the introduction of role of parental advocacy at a provisional, as well as public, level. This project involves the development of a website with the goal of educating parents and stakeholders in India about the concept of parents as advocates in the education of their children with special needs and provides strategies adopted by parents worldwide to be effective advocates. Once the parents and stakeholders know the importance of parents’ involvement in the education of their children with disabilities, there is a possibility of amendments and provisions of new educational policies such as Individualized Education Plans for children with disabilities. Parents can raise their voices for a better platform for the education of their children. These voices can lead to more legal provisions like IDEA and sources of support and training programs for parents for effective advocacy by the Government of India.

Keywords: parents, advocacy, special education, identification and assessment, advocacy training, impairment, disability
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List of Abbreviations

ADHD     Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPACT</td>
<td>Individuals Education Program Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>People with Disabilities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBT</td>
<td>School-based Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSA</td>
<td>SarvaShikshaAbhiyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GoI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTML</td>
<td>Hyper Text Markup Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCI</td>
<td>Rehabilitation Council of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICDS</td>
<td>Integrated Child Development Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCH</td>
<td>Mothers and Child Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEDC</td>
<td>Integrated Education for the Disabled Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOS</td>
<td>National Open Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Open Basic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UEE</td>
<td>Universal Elementary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAIED</td>
<td>Special Accredited Institution for Education of the Disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAT</td>
<td>Special Education Advocacy Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAP</td>
<td>Volunteer Advocacy Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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List of Figures
Chapter 1: Introduction
Since childhood, I was brought up to be an independent Indian child in which there were no enabling attitudes from my parents—especially my father. I was usually put up in difficult situations and I was asked to get out of them on my own. My parents did not coddle me, but nor did I need extra support nor advocacy. This independence gradually allowed me to develop some basic skills and aspects of my personality such as self-determination, critical thinking, a problem-solving attitude, self-motivation, inquisitiveness, commitment, sacrifice, knowledge, recognition, and a scholarly approach. With the passage of time, I started to become a part of society and school, which in the Indian culture, are considered second homes to a person. Those institutions are the basis of each and every kind of learning, as life became more complex and beyond my family structure.

Later, I entered my profession as a teacher. I worked in an elementary school for six months, and I came to know many students and their unique learning needs. I had a class of 48 students and 28 of them fell under special categories with unique needs. Some of the students were so independent that they required little extra support from me, their parents, or the school environment to get good grades or to achieve their potential. Some were among those who had special needs but coped well with the support of their parents, the school environment, and myself. Others were deprived of the necessary supports—which was devastating.

I came across many parents in parent-teacher meetings who advocated for their children with regular needs. Although I never needed that type of parental support to succeed, I began to see how this advocacy helped the students excel in maths, improve their classroom behaviour management, and reduce emotional disturbances in the regular classrooms. This support helped make tremendous contribution to their child’s potential and to improve learning environments,
which might have been so supportive. I talked to many parents who said that their support and awareness had done a lot in their child’s life.

Unfortunately, when it came to high incidence disabilities such as Autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) among children, I did not observe parental advocacy of their children. Perhaps this specific to the Indian context or even to my own limited experience, but I noted a great lack of parental advocacy on behalf of their special needs children who were significantly high needs. Alternatively, the parents of children with low-incidence difficulties in learning were often willing to put efforts to help their children succeed in their studies because they perceived it to be possible.

In order to obtain answers to these questions, I used to talk to my colleagues at school. Some of my colleagues had similar concerns about this lack of action, but many of my peers were similarly passive—like some parents of children with disabilities, they perceived that nothing could be done to help these children. This curiosity and concern lead me to this course, where I gained knowledge of the many things that could be done as a teacher to provide a quality education to these children. But the most fascinating and important thing I came across was what could be done as parent! Here, in Canada, as well during my studies, we had many discussions about the role of parents in inclusive education and its implementation for students with high incidence disabilities in which parents have done effective job as advocates. I began to wonder, what are Indian parents missing that would help them be better advocates for their children?
Definition of Key Terms

Advocacy is defined as “taking one’s own or another’s perspective to obtain result not otherwise available” and involves “presenting, supporting, or defending a position (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, pp. 294-297).

According to Munro (1991), familial advocacy of children with special needs has been defined as “[a] non-violent empowerment and support process, through which families with disabled relatives can constructively express dissatisfaction and contribute to creative solutions to problems existing in human services systems” (as cited in Nachshen & Jamieson, 2000, p. 39). It is also stated that there is two types of advocacy witnessed among parents—that is case advocacy and cause advocacy. Case advocacy is acting on behalf of a client (individual, family or group) in order to access needed resources, services, or to influence policy change; alternatively, cause advocacy is about a change in the system and raising awareness of a cause. Case advocacy may involve representing a child’s interests through phone calls, office meetings, and letters (Balcazar, Keys, Bertram, & Rizzo, 1996; Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, & Summers, 2004) as well as presenting reasons for educational accommodations or other accommodations and monitoring progress (Duquette, Stodel, Fullarton, & Hagglund, 2011). Some parents may shift from case to cause advocacy, as they expand their focus to other individuals with disabilities by organizing with other parents (Mlawer, 1993).

Background and Justification

Advocacy is a dynamic process that changes based upon the developmental needs of the individuals with special needs. It begins from educational and social opportunities, such as early intervention services, when parents seek educational assessment and appropriate learning placements when the children enter school and the focus of advocacy often shifts to community
integration and preparation for adulthood during transition to secondary school. (Wright & Taylor, 2014). When children with disabilities enter the school-based special education service delivery system, The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) mandates that their parents should be included as active participants in the educational decision-making and planning process. When considering the highest level of family participation in special education services, it is recommended that parents and professionals collaborate to identify appropriate curriculum content, plan appropriate special education and related services to provide effective instruction on that content, and ensure placement in the least restrictive environment. Research suggests that families with a child who has significant disabilities must frequently advocate for the most appropriate curriculum content, instructional services, and educational placement. (Ryndak, Orlando, Storch, Denny, & Huffman, 2011). Along with this, McCammon, Spencer, and Friesen (2001) suggested that parents have been called the natural advocates for their children due to their commitments and investments in their child’s well-being. Additionally, parental advocacy can and has resulted in important outcomes at the micro and macro levels (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Vincent, 2000)

Therefore, enhancing the capacity of families to meet the special needs of the infants and toddlers is the specific goal of IDEA legislation. Ultimately, this suggests that preparing parents to be skilful and effective advocates for their children is a key component. Along with this, parents of young children with special needs may receive support and training to become advocate for their children if they participate in early intervention or preschool programs funded through the IDEA (Wright & Taylor, 2014). In India, however, parents do not possess the awareness necessary in order to advocate for the education of their children with special needs. They lack the proper knowledge concerning advocacy and are not aware of rights and support
available to children with special needs which has led to many children sitting at home without proper support services. For instance, my grandmother was blessed with a baby boy who had ADHD and that later passed away when he was 32. During those years, it did not even occur to my grandparents to send him to school. Having grown up as an independent child, I could never have imagined that a parent can play such an imperative role in a child’s life nor that a child would need such support. But after coming across the experiences of others, I have realised the importance of being an effective advocate for a child—who is not successful yet to stand by him or herself. I want every parent in India to have the same feeling for their children with special needs.

We need to shift our current cultural view that suggests we first see the disability instead of the child. I have spent 25 years of my life in India and I know which roles parents play in life of their children. In my perspective, there are untapped encouragement and resources that can support parents throughout their struggle to support their children with special needs. Undoubtedly, it does not mean that Indian parents are not concerned about their children with special needs. Rather, it means that they need a kind of platform and a support to reach to, and I think my project work could be that type of resources for those parents.

**Brief Overview of Project**

The goal of my project was to create a website that can be used by Indian parents to provide various tools and support to help Indian parents to advocate effectively for their children with special needs. The website explains what advocacy is, what is involved in it, why advocacy is important, and what strategies can be adopted by Indian parents to be effective advocates for education their children with special needs. Since not much has been done in India regarding the education of special children and inclusion, this website is a first step for parents in the world
they have always dreamt of for their children. This website includes the aspects of parental advocacy that have worked worldwide and that could be implemented in India.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

I have been interested in exploring the challenges concerning advocacy faced by the parents of exceptional children/children with special needs, and the ways in which they can become effective advocates for the education of their children. The goal of my project was to create a website that can be used by Indian parents to advocate effectively for their children with special needs. The website explains why advocacy is important and what strategies can be adopted by Indian parents to be effective advocates for their children with special needs. This website includes the aspects of parental advocacy that have worked worldwide and may be implemented in India.

My query relies on an examination of the existing literature that creates a basis for identifying the barriers to advocacy and the efforts which have proven effective in overcoming those barriers. This literature review will begin by examining: (a) a history of advocacy efforts initiated by parents; (b) the need for advocating for children; (c) the benefits of advocacy by parents; (d) barriers faced by parents while advocating for their children; and (e) strategies and resources used worldwide for training parents to advocate for their exceptional children.

History of Advocacy Efforts

Each country has its own religious, economic, and cultural differences that shape its attitude towards people with exceptionalities. In India, many people believe that their children with disabilities are a gift—or a punishment—from God (Misra, 2000). Because of the low literacy rate, inaccessibility to information, and poor medical care, the treatment of children with disabilities and their families is a concern since their knowledge may be based on misinformation. In coping with children with disabilities, parents face many challenges such as the child’s problem behaviours, a lack of acceptance by extended family members and friends,
and financial constraints. Families also report the lack of information, lack of empathy, and incorrect recommendations by their doctors and medical profession (Peshawaria, Menon, Ganguly, Roy, Pillay & Gupta, 1998).

For some families who have children with disabilities in India, special schools are making a positive difference. These schools are providing valuable educational services and supports for children and their parents. While these schools are not always available or affordable for all families, they can offer safe and focused learning environments in which children can succeed. They may also provide a new community for parents to build friendships with other parents who face similar challenges (Bryde, 2010).

Historically, the people of India have not looked to government programs for support. Families take care of themselves without depending on the state for assistance and these responsibilities also include the care of the elderly, sick, or the disabled (Alur, 2001). In Indian culture, the family is seen not only as mother and father and children, but also as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. Within this framework, Indian families have unique challenges as they make decisions about the schooling and care of their children particularly those with disabilities.

One challenge for parents is the increased job opportunities along with their associated stress stemming from demands as India develops as a nation and work becomes more plentiful. With more available opportunities, many mothers are now working outside the home to help provide financial contributions for the family (Misra, 2000). As these mothers work outside of the home, the question becomes—who will care for the children? This question is especially difficult for parents in urban areas who may not have extended family supports for their children because grandparents and relatives live in the rural areas. For these families, they must depart
from custom and look outside their collective support structures for help (Vakil, Welton, & Khanna, 2002).

Other families face challenges related to illiteracy especially in rural areas, where most of the population lives (Thomas & Thomas, 2002). Therefore, social, economic, and cultural situation of the country plays an important role in deciding the role of parents in the lives of their children with special needs.

According to the literature present about the parents of children with special needs in India, most of the research work is focussed on exclusion of mothers of children with disabilities in a Montessori school, family awareness of legislative issues on child with cerebral palsy, the challenge of caring for a disabled child, parental attitude and needs of the parents having children with intellectual disability, study of needs and expectations of parents of intellectually disabled children and parents’ attitude towards inclusion of their children with disabilities. Aahay, Prakash, Khaique and Kumar (2013) found that most of the parents need information and financial support, average percentage of parents need childcare services, community services and professional support and family and social support was required by very less percentage of parents. Along with this, parents expressed the desire for information about future and current services available in society and community particularly in technology development and information on various teaching and educational methods of the child. Apart from this, due to lack of openness among parents about their child’s condition was the major reason behind the lack of information and access to information but almost all the parents had the desire to provide best services for their child in terms of education and in terms of development. Therefore, according to the literature I have came across focus of research has been on the basic needs of children with disabilities and their parents but I could not find a single study
on concerns of parents regarding the education of their children with special needs or advocacy efforts made by Indian parents for the education of their children. Though the parents try to put an effort for the education of their children, there is no specific terminology such as “advocacy” used to assist in these efforts, and there are no specific policies.

Need for Advocating for Children

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in Canada clearly sets forth a policy expectation that parents will be active participants in the educational decision-making. Though there is not the use of the term “parental advocacy” or the term “advocate” but advocacy is a specific type of parents’ participation, which is clear by the language used in IDEA. Parents have a duty not just to be joint decision makers but also the duty to push, prod, and even “fight” for appropriate services and supports. This is the key theme of perception regarding advocacy by parents.

The need to advocate for children with special needs is more essential compared to typically developing children (Mlawer, 1993). This advocacy expectation may be explicit or implicit with early intervention programs that prepare parents to be advocates for their children (Wang et al., 2004), or in the design of policies that require parents to initiate the process of securing services for their children respectively (Kalyanpur, 2000). Apart from this, parental advocacy is necessary for ensuring that children receive the services they need to maximize their developmental potential (Wright & Taylor, 2014).

Strong advocacy efforts are often a necessity to insure laws, such as IDEA, which are followed by school districts for a reason such as - school systems often do not respond well to special needs children because they bring unique needs, that schools often cannot accommodate since they contradict bureaucratic rules (Pardeck, 1996). Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull
&Summers (2004) supported this notion and suggested that poor-quality educational services are not only a barrier to successful educational experiences for children with disabilities, but also the major reason parents believe they must advocate for their child.

Secondly, Pardeck (1996) explained that the need for strong advocacy efforts arises from the fact that schools often do not follow laws such as IDEA because according to their perception, needs of exceptional children are too costly. Therefore, parents must realize that these reasons are often used by schools as justification for not providing services to exceptional children, and parents must resist these kinds of social injustice through strong advocacy efforts. Apart from this, Resch, Mireles, Benz, Grenwelge, Peterson and Zhang (2010) suggested another catalyst for parental involvement in situations, such as after experiencing the distress of a diagnosis and experiencing the need to mobilize for services, which leads to parental advocacy.

Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson- Grewal, (2014) conducted a study using the lens of the four dimensions of advocacy. Specifically, this study examined the advocacy activities of 16 parents whose children had been identified as intellectually gifted. Parents were recruited through a notice that appeared on an ABC website and they responded to items in a lengthy questionnaire and participated in individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. The findings demonstrated that, much like the parents of children with disabilities, these participants were primarily focused on meeting the needs of their children. When they exercised their right to be involved in the process of decision making for their children, many parents faced oppositions, particularly on the issues of identification of giftedness, placement, and accommodations for children with a dual diagnosis. These parents responded by advocating for the specific needs of their sons and daughters.
Therefore, it is crucial for parents in India to know that advocacy is a key strategy to overcome all of the struggles they are facing in the education of their children with special needs, beginning by asking the government for the policy that highlights the involvement of parents in the education of their children to be effective advocates. This can also be learnt from the history of advocacy efforts of other developed countries such as Canada and the United States where people initiated everything by contacting with others and asking for policies and their involvement in the education of their children with special needs.

Benefits of Advocating for One’s Child

There is no doubt that in both elementary and secondary school, parental involvement in the education of their children positively affects academic achievement (Epstein, 1995; Heyman & Earle, 2000; Hung, 2005). Along with this, the quality of this involvement may also impact the social and emotional functioning of children (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

According to the perception of parents, advocacy is a means to improve services and outcomes for their children and families. The activities in which they most frequently engaged in were making phone calls, writing letters, following up on commitments, contacting someone in authority, and educating professionals about their child's specific strengths and needs. Parents also believed that these activities served the purpose of helping to improve services for their child and they also mentioned that their advocacy efforts could be helpful to push systems change at community and state levels. Apart from this, parents spoke about networking throughout the community and state to improve connections between agencies and to smooth out disconnections between organizations that resulted in service gaps for families and children (Wang, et al., 2004).
Kalyanpur and Harry (1999), as well as Vincent (2000), found that important micro and macro levels outcomes are as a result of parental advocacy. At the micro level, advocacy can result in improved services for the child and better quality of life for the family. While many parents may focus on advocacy for their child only, the personal becomes political and thus advocacy transforms into activism, which involves joining with other parents to transform systems and encourage more responsive services (Zaretsky, 2004). At the macro level, legislative changes, improved public awareness and community education, and more funding directed at disability services and research can be promoted through parental advocacy. (Balcazar, Keys, Bertram & Rizzo 1996; Black & Baker, 2011).

**Barriers to Advocating Effectively**

There are various barriers to advocating effectively for children depending on factors such as: the educational system in different countries, the culture, the socio-economic status, educational level of parents, communication, sources of knowledge about the disability, and time-management by parents. The following are the major barriers:

**Lack of knowledge.** Kevin et al. (2015) suggested that, in most cases, the lack of knowledge that existed at the beginning of parents’ advocacy journeys prevented them from being able to effectively communicate with school officials. Along with this, some parents possessed knowledge of rights; however, acquiring this knowledge can prove to be challenging for some parents due to the level of language used in writing the laws, rights and duties of parents (Hutchinson, Pyle, Villeneuve, Dods, Dalton, & Minnes, 2014). Specifically, these parents expressed frustration at their inability to advocate successfully for their children and suggested that insufficient knowledge of what their children were entitled to at school was the reason for this, which limited their effectiveness as advocates (Hutchinson et al., 2014).
**Parent-school dynamics.** Pena (2000) noted that teachers can mistake a parent’s passion for their child as hostility or judgment. The difficulty for parents is that they are usually not as knowledgeable about terminology or school procedures as teachers, and they lack the confidence to communicate efficiently with school officials. As a result, their passion to ensure that their child’s needs are met can interfere with their ability to be effective advocates. In addition, interpersonal factors, such as the teacher or school official’s timing of conferences, their use of professional jargon in communication, reference to high caseloads, and implied authority over decisions, lead parents to feel devalued and act as an obstacle to parents’ advocacy efforts (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995).

An example of the complexities of parent-school dynamics is evident in Stanley’s (2015) study that involved 12 English-speaking African-American mothers and “other mothers” of children who had disabilities recognized by the school system and who resided in a rural area. The researcher developed semi-structured interview protocols within the context of this study and conducted two participant interviews with the goal of identifying themes that reflected individual experiences related to the phenomenon of advocacy as well as common themes across the sample. The first interview focused on the nature and extent of the mothers’ advocacy experiences and their individual strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence. The purpose of the second interview was to gain an understanding of the nature and extent of the mothers’ participation in various types of social organizations and networks, the range of transactions that took place within these networks, and the collective action in which mothers might have participated on behalf of their children with disabilities.

Stanley (2015) reported that when mothers perceived that school professionals did not hear and validate their concerns, it frustrated them. This dismissal limited their ability to
advocate. Additionally, parental perception of professionals as experts of their field prevented them from questioning educators and administrators. These results are supported by the findings of the study conducted by Fish (2006) who stated that parents restrict themselves from proving meaningful input in the IEP process when they perceive educators as devaluing their input.

Stanley (2015) asserted that work, time constraints, and residing in rural areas have a clear negative influence on mothers’ ability to achieve positive outcomes for their children. As well, mothers’ ability to widen their social networks and strengthen their special education knowledge was hindered by the absence of formal support groups. Along with this, it is very difficult for low-income families to attend schools meetings scheduled at short notice and at time periods that are difficult for parents to attend as these families have less ability to change work schedules (Harry, et al., 1995; Lareau&Shumar, 1996). In addition, the reading level of materials sent to parents may not be appropriate and comprehensible, which again creates a barrier for understanding (Harry, 1992; Leung, 1996), particularly when non-English speaking parents are sent materials in English only (Weiss & Coyne, 1997). The behaviour of professionals may also serve as a logistical deterrent to advocacy, including limited time for conferences, emphasis on documents by the school personnel rather than participation, and the use of professional jargon (Harry et al., 1995).

Parents can find that the role of advocate puts them in an uncomfortable adversarial relationship with professionals (Bennett, Deluca, &Bruns, 1997; Trainor, 2010). So, for parents with cultural orientations, that view professionals with high regards, fear of being labelled as “trouble” or being in the spotlight sometimes hold them back from advocacy (Resch et al., 2010). Particularly, some cultures perceive professionals as a source of unquestionable knowledge and parents may not expect to be treated as an equal and collaborator in making decisions on behalf
of their child. Moreover, the level of assertiveness needed for advocacy can conflict with cultural norms (Kalyanpur, 2000).

**Socio-economic status of parents.** Harry et al. (2005) asserted that parents with low socio-economic status and parents from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds face the greatest barriers to parent-professional collaboration which leads to poor advocacy efforts. Research on family involvement reveals that working-class and low-income families possess limited or less effective social resources as compared to middle and upper-income families. Parents’ abilities to obtain information, intervene, and advocate for their children are less successful because of the social mismatch between the home and the school (Lareau&Shumar, 1996). Specifically, working-class and low-income families do not use the social networks upper-class families share with school professionals which can make interactions difficult at times (Lareau&Shumar, 1996). In addition, Dunst, Trivette, and Deal (1988) suggested that low-income families may have more difficulty recognizing needs related to their children’s development which is a necessary antecedent to advocacy (as cited in Mlawer, 1993).

**Strategies to Overcome Barriers to Advocating Effectively**

According to Duquette et al. (2011), the 4-Dimensions Advocacy Model asserts that successful advocacy is a constant responsibility that consistently requires parental input. The first dimension, *awareness*, refers to the point when parents recognize a difference between their child and his or her peers. The second dimension, *knowledge seeking*, signifies the parents’ attempts when they try to learn more about why their child is different from his or her peers. The third dimension, *presenting the case*, is the reflection of parents’ attempts to negotiate with the school system to meet their child’s exceptional needs. The fourth dimension, *monitoring*, involves when the parents evaluate school system’s implementation of accommodations for their
child which parents agreed on. Duquette et al. (2011) concluded that the four dimensions were not in a sequence, and advocacy is always an ongoing process. Furthermore, Duquette et al. (2011) noted that as parents became more skilled advocates, they continue to experience critical events that trigger additional advocacy action.

Neumeister, Yssel, & Burney, (2013) shared a retrospective viewpoint on parental advocacy based on the research question of what was successful for me? The researchers used grounded theory methodology, including theoretical sampling, constant comparative data analysis, and identification of a core category. According to these researchers, participants were only successful advocates after they realized and accepted two fundamental responsibilities. Firstly, recognising and understanding the characteristics of their child’s exceptionality and secondly primary caregivers had to assume primary responsibility for their child’s academic developments. Neumeister et al. (2013) wrote, “[Primary caregivers] were protective and vigilant about making sure their children could have positive experiences in all their environments,” they noted that parents felt school officials were less interested in creating collaborative relationships (p. 266).

As far as the lack of knowledge being a barrier to successful advocating, Trainor (2010) found that parent support groups and organizations, via the Internet and in person, are a key source of support for parents in their role as advocates. However, more strategic advocacy results from these sources and parents may gain access to information on disabilities and methods for approaching special education. Additionally, social relationships can be formed with other parents to provide mutual support and reduce feelings of social isolation (Black & Baker, 2011). Moreover, parent groups can also provide specialized trainings and offer a chance to join with other parents for collective action (Madden, 1995).
Fortunately, institutions such as hospitals, court systems, social service centres, and other not-for-profit agencies for information and assistance about parenting and other concerns can be voluntarily or involuntarily accessed by families with children experiencing academic, behavioural, or medical problems (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003). This, in turn, may provide families with “social leverage” to improve their social and material conditions. However, in the study conducted by Hutchinson et al. (2014), they extended the term “social leverage” to the family–school relationship to show how parents used multiple institutional agents to advocate for the welfare of the child and the family.

In the case of parent-teacher relationships, families reported that they found it especially helpful to have partnerships with professionals via open communication, equality, trust, and respect. Apart from this, parents also become more empowered, knowledgeable and motivated with the help of family-professional collaborative partnership and motivated, thus leading to the enhancement of Family Quality of Life (Wang et al., 2004). In this article, families' perceptions of their advocacy efforts and the impact of these efforts on their family’s quality of life was reported. A total of 104 family respondents participated in focus groups and individual interviews. Through qualitative analysis, two themes related to parents' perceptions about their advocacy actions were identified: advocacy as an obligation, and advocacy as a means to improve services. Three themes also emerged regarding parents' perceptions of the impact of their advocacy actions: (a) advocacy enhances coping; (b) advocacy involves struggle; and (c) advocacy causes stress. The issues related to these themes as well as two factors, such as the quality of their partnerships and of their child's education, that may mediate the impacts of parental advocacy were discussed. Along with this, implications for practice were discussed and
tips for educators to improve their practices to better support families in their advocacy efforts were provided.

**Skills required to advocate effectively.** Public Law 94-142 was enacted in 1975 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in United States of America. Activist groups who lobbied for the passage of laws protecting the rights of children with disabilities in the school setting grounded their arguments in *Brown vs. The board of education*. Along with this, parents of exceptional children played a critical role in the creation of other disability laws, which were enacted to protect the rights of children with disabilities. Clearly, parents have a primary responsibility for ensuring that their special needs children receive appropriate services as mandated by law and parents often have the greatest knowledge about their children's medical and academic history. Moreover, they must be sure that this critical information becomes part of the IEPs (Individual Education Programs) of their children which can only be achieved if parents learn how to effectively advocate for their children. With the goal to empower parents and to ultimately achieve social justice for their exceptional children who have been denied the basic rights, the following strategies and skills, based on materials from the Missouri Parents Act (MPACT), are designed to help parents become more effective advocates for their children. (Pardeck, 1996):

a) Parents must believe in their rights;

b) Parents must have a clear vision;

c) Organisation;

d) Prioritisation;

e) Understanding children’s disabilities;

f) Parents must know the laws;
g) Parents must follow the chain of command;

h) Parents should be informative;

i) Parents should offer solutions;

j) Parents must be principled and persistent;

k) Parents must learn to communicate effectively;

l) Parents must let others know when they are pleased;

m) Develop endurance;

n) Parents must follow through.

Analysis

An analysis of the literature’s reveals the issue is culturally charged. When it comes to historical context, most developed countries like the United States have history of advocacy efforts. However, in India, there is a lack of not only literature on the history of parental advocacy efforts, but also of literature on the methods and strategies for parental advocacy. Unfortunately, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the experiences of parents when they advocated for the special education of their children. Along with this, the economic condition of India as a developing country also contribute to lack of efforts by the government as stated in history, and largely families are only responsible for their special children. This gap in the literature on parental advocacy for special needs children in supports the need for my project.

My Project

The body of literature in this chapter suggests that a great deal of work has been done to help parents advocate effectively, but a very little has been done in the context of India and the Indian educational system. I hope my efforts will make Indian parents consider looking at the work done worldwide. This was one of the reasons for my being in Canada: to learn something
from this developed country and implement what I learned in my own nation in order to make a
difference in the lives of children living in miserable conditions.
Chapter 3: Considerations for Implementation of Product

My project question was “What can parents do to effectively advocate for the education of their special children in India?” My project involved creating a website that Indian parents can use as a resource to advocate effectively for the education of their special children. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the history of advocacy efforts in India; the need to advocate for the child; barriers to advocating effectively for children; and identified strategies that could be adopted to advocate effectively. On the basis of my observation and experience as a teacher in Punjab, I asserted that there is a dire need for parents in Punjab to advocate for the education of their special children, which initially triggered my interest in this project. This chapter will articulate the project description, including the goals, purpose, and knowledge transferred; support for the project design; describe the steps to completion; and provide justification for the type of secondary data used.

Project Choices

When gathering support and information for the website, I wanted to use studies which used a mixed methods approach as I need both qualitative and quantitative data to support the claims I was making about effective advocacy. Therefore, the major source of these articles was the library of the institution. I gathered online articles, as well as hard copies of journals from the library. As my topic of choice was influenced by Canadian Education system and parents who have advocated for the education of their children with special needs, the detailed description of advocacy and strategies was collected through resources available in Canada as mentioned before. However, the project was to be applied in Indian Education system so the general information about the laws, policies and classification of special needs, availability of schools, identification and assessment was done with the help of handbooks published by Ministry of
Education in India and through articles published in India about role of families and role of governments. Along with this, Wikipedia was utilized for simple and common information. I also gathered previous handbooks or websites published for parents- for detailed description, magazines for reliable information, and other resources were used to make ideas more clear and detailed.

The audience of this website are Indian parents and there is therefore a wide spectrum of literacy. As a result, the language used in the website is simple and layman can understand that language. However, for well-educated parents or other more academic audiences, there is a list of articles, websites, handbooks and other sources provided for a more detailed description of the issue. Similarly, Indian parents were kept in mind while choosing the web content, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) web content, templates, and content management. Web content is the textual, visual or aural content that is encountered as part of the user experience on website. So, in order to serve my users (Indian parents) better, I have kept the content very simple with the use of eye-catching pictures and videos in order to serve different types of readers or learners.

A website template is a pre-designed webpage or set of HTML web pages that anyone can use to “plug-in” their own text content or image into to create a website. Using the page based model of sharing information, the idea of choosing the present template was clear. I wanted it to be very simple, specific and easy to read and access. As in this template, it is very clear on the screen which information is to be shared and under which categories without any further searches within the website or without delving into different headings in order to reach the desired information. However when it came to HTML web content, it was totally avoided as it is very difficult for a layman to access Blogs, Search engine sites, discussion boards or e-
commerce sites. Interestingly, content management is done in such a manner that makes it easy to navigate and easy to use as everything is just one click apart, hyperlinks within the texts are avoided, too much information on page is avoided and necessary contacts are provided at the end in order to avoid complexity of the website.

This website decision seemed obvious because most of the parents in India use social media to obtain and exchange of information. “A website is a group of World Wide Web pages usually containing hyperlinks to each other and made available online by an individual, company, educational institution, government, or organization” (Merriam Webster, p.n. 94). I also believe that a website is better choice than conducting a workshop or creating a handbook. Workshops would come with potential barriers as people in India are ashamed and they feel guilty about their child’s exceptionality and would never come forward to attend the workshop. Furthermore taking into consideration the interest of Indians reading interest, a handbook would not have been so helpful to reach people. Therefore, I believe a website would reach a wider audience due to the fact that it is a resource that respects privacy and is the popular source to share and gain information.

Project Design and Steps to Completion

The most important initial step was to look for peer reviewed articles in order to have a basis of relevant data. All the information stated in the project description was collected accordingly. As it was quite clear from the history of advocacy efforts, there is not much research available on advocacy by parents in India. Thus, most of the information was collected from other countries as well as the experiences parents shared are from different countries.

It is important to note that the barriers of Indian parents were assumed to be similar to those experiences from other cultures as there was no such research stating the barriers faced by
Indian parents. The basis for this generalisation for Indian parents was the geographical similarities, expectation similarities of parents, and lack of knowledge, as these are the general obstacles faced by Indian parents when it comes to education of their children with special needs. Along with this, strategies were modified to fit with the Indian Education system. For instance, there is no IEP in India, however, there are just lesson plans. So, the strategies for IEP meetings were transformed into involvement in planning and many other modifications were made according to Indian Education system.

After the collection of information, the design was chosen for the website and data was distributed into eight major categories. After the data collection, a design for the website was chosen from the internet using sites, which are helpful in creating websites like- wix.com. The aim was not to just provide information, but it was also to make it look eye-catching so that parents could feel those colours of hope in their child’s life. All the neutral colours were used for the background and the use of very bright colours was avoided keeping in mind the side effects of too much light. Along with this, the size of the text is neither too small nor too large, it is kept normal for the sake of all types of audiences. And the choice of pictures, videos and the page outline like- how the page would look like was all done according to Indian scenario.

The decision to create a website also forced me to recognize my own strengths and weaknesses. Although I am not the most proficient at technology, I gave my best effort to create a website. What I realized was, due to lack of website design skills, I was not able to present the information in an effective way and polished looking way. Therefore, part of my process also included accessing a third party source to help polish and shape the website itself. That source took the information I researched, and followed my design instructions and goals, to help shape visual the product the way it is now.
Summary of Website Content

Beginning with the domain of the website, the domain is “parentaladvocacy.in” and the logo of the website is “Parental Advocacy.” The users can access the website using this domain and this domain will be made available to the known parents, students, teachers, co-workers and my family so that they could spread awareness of this website as an available resource when they require information related to parental advocacy. This website has approximately 8 pages with eight major categories: home, special education, legal provisions, finding a school, identification and assessment, advocacy, strategies, helpful programs. These areas are important for parents if they are to be effective advocates for their children and will assist them in developing specific skills required to do so.

Home: This page entails sub categories such as defining special education internationally, Persons with Disabilities Act, PWD (1995), Definition of Disabilities and special education in Indian context. All this information is in Indian as well as in the general context in order to provide Indian parents information of what special education is in theory and in practice. The pictures below (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2) shed light on how the pages would be organised and represented.
**Figure 3.1.** First page of Website. This figure illustrate look of first page of website.

**Figure 3.2.** Home Page. This figure illustrates the sub categories under the main category home.
Legal provisions. This page (see Figure 3.3) covers information concerning legal provisions that are currently available in India for people with disabilities including subcategories: what does the constitution has about people with disabilities; People with Disabilities Act (PWD); United Nations (UN) declaration on special education; the national trust for welfare of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation (a term still used in India, for a legal document or policy); and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999). The purpose of this page is to inform parents that their special child is not a burden on them and it is the government’s responsibility to provide assistance when it comes to their child with special needs.

Identification and assessment. This page (See Figure 3.4) includes the information concerning the identification of children with special needs so that parents have an idea of where they should begin when it comes to education of their children with special needs and it will
allow them to help other parents in the prevention of disabilities. The identification and assessment criteria are according to the Indian Education system and Education Commission of India. The sub categories under this page are: prevention of disabilities; identification of impairments; identification outside home; assessment of impairments; and contact information. The contact information in this section includes the address and contact information of places, centres and people helpful in assessment of impairments.

Figure 3.4. Identification and assessment. This picture illustrates the distribution of categories under this main page.

Finding a school. This page (see Figure 3.5) covers the information about types of schools and where they can send their children for primary or secondary level education. The page contains sub-categories such as: Education of Children with Special Needs, Formal Schools, Special Schools, National Open Schools and contact information. There is brief
summary of the features of these schools along with information on enrolment of children in these schools.

Figure 3.5. Finding a school. This figure illustrates the distribution of categories under this category.

**Advocacy.** The central theme of creating this page (See Figure 3.6) is to create awareness among Indian parents about the concept of advocacy. IDEA and parental advocacy, what is advocacy, different types of advocates, stages of advocacy, why do parents need to advocate, and how international parents perceive advocacy are the subcategories under this heading. At the end of this page, there are some files that Indian parents can access for more information.
Figure 3.6. Advocacy. This figure illustrates the distribution of categories under this main page.

**Strategies.** Under this section (See Figure 3.7), there is information on helpful strategies. These strategies are used world-wide for advocacy by parents and other sources of support. Specifically, this outlines the sub categories such as: processes related to advocacy, related
barriers, strategies to overcome barriers and skills required to advocate effectively.

*Figure 3.7. Strategies. This figure illustrates the distribution of categories under this main page.*

**Helpful programs.** This page (see Figure 3.8) includes information on the role of training programs in making parents effective advocates, supporting factors of advocacy and examples of training programs running worldwide for training parents on effective advocacy.
Figure 3.8. Helpful programs. This figure illustrates the distribution of categories under this main page.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 highlighted a strong introduction on the background related to project, my context, definition of key terms, and brief overview of project. Chapter 2 included a broad literature review on: the perception of parents regarding advocacy; the need for parents to advocate for their children; the barriers faced by parents worldwide while advocating for their special children; and strategies which can be used or has proven effective in helping parents to advocate for their child’s education. This chapter described the purpose, goals and the kind of knowledge to be transferred; support used for the project, project design and steps to completion. The final chapter will include my reflections of my learning and the process of creating this project.
Chapter 4: Reflection

Summary of Process

My original intention was to create a handbook that would work as a bridge between Indian parents and the Indian education system in order to make the life of children with special needs better. After I started collecting relevant information about the Indian education system and the role of parental advocacy in the education of their special children, I realised that there was a lot of information on advocacy that Indian parents have been deprived of. For example, there are not enough studies in India which describe the advocacy experiences of parents of children with special needs in India.

Accordingly, this shifted my focus from providing general information parents need to know about special needs in India to effective advocacy. This overall scenario entailed articulating: what special education is in general and in Indian context; general legal provisions for special children in India; educational provisions; finding a schools in India; identification and assessment of special needs; what advocacy is; how to advocate; which strategies could be helpful for effective advocacy; and helpful programs running worldwide for training parents for advocacy. This identification made it very clear that handbook was not the right choice for this much information. Due to the wide spectrum of audience, a website was an obvious choice so that parents could get access to the extra information if they require to.

Discussion

The purpose of creating this website was to support and educate parents on advocacy and provide tools and information on how to be effective advocates for the education of their children with special needs. Parents play the most important role in a person’s life. When a child is born to the time when the child is totally independent, parents are always there to support,
educate, train, forgive and teach in all aspects of life—physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually.

As the child grows, there is a need to move from the simple to the complex, and parents are always there to deal with those needs accordingly so that their child could reach the full potential especially in education. This is very evident in a country like India, where previous research indicates that Indian parents rank the highest in terms of parental involvement in the child’s education. Interestingly, when it comes to children with special needs, parents do not rely on governments for services. Rather, they take care of their children on their own.

Though the schools in India are making a positive difference in the lives of children with special needs, the lack of provision of these schools in some areas is the most challenging part for parents. Along with this, the lack of one central policy for education of children with special needs as well as a lack of infrastructure, proper funding, and knowledge are barriers to parents who wish to learn about the education of children with special needs. So, this website was created to spread awareness and knowledge among those parents in India who have no idea about what they can do for the education of their special children as parents. Furthermore, if they do have strategies on how to tackle this problem, they do not have the proper platform to contact or approach the people associated with this field such as psychologists, special educators, doctors, physiotherapist, occupational therapists, schools for different needs, assessment tools etcetera, who can help them in this journey so that these barriers could be removed and their children could spend a good life.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 suggested the need to advocate, the role of parents as advocates, what parents are doing to advocate for the education of their children with special needs worldwide, what barriers they have faced, how they could overcome those barriers, and how they
could be effective advocates for education of their children with special needs. All of this can be something very new and helpful for some parents, and could be a way for those who have already begun a journey of advocacy but do not know that what this process is called. A website will be a supportive way to inform parents about advocacy and how to be effective advocates. It is important to note that the website is organised concisely to educate and inform the parents, and can be followed and understood by anyone. As the purpose of the website is to educate and inform, therefore, I have not included any interventions.

**Reflection**

I have been a teacher for 11 months and, during this time, I have had valuable opportunities to observe and learn from each student and each parent. I taught grade 6 to 10 for 6 months, and grade 3 for six months. My experience as a teacher was incredible; I had different students with diverse needs and diverse potentials. But the only similarity in those 11 months was the faces of parents that I used to see in all of the parent-teacher meetings. All the anxiety, worry, trust, and, sometimes, seeking hope from me as a teacher, a hope from the education system or the school to help their child reach their full potential.

Through that time of interacting with parents who had children with very basic needs and who needed little support, I began to start thinking of parents who had children with special needs. I had also seen my grandmother talking about my uncle whom she lost when he was 32 because of lack of care and support from the Indian system. So, parents and their role in the education of their children with special needs never left my mind.

In India, role of parents of children with special needs in education is a topic that is almost never discussed. Raising awareness about the role of parents, advocacy, and important strategies in India can help broaden public information, interest, and awareness. It is important to
rectify the limited information and the lack of resources that are in place. It is also necessary to properly support and educate families living with children with disabilities.

Currently, there is research on policies which emphasize the role of families, and the situation of families of children with special needs. Although that is a good start, my concern is that this is behind where I am right now as the current research is not up to the standards that are set by the education system I am part of right now in Canada. To be very truthful, though I was educated in a good private school, I taught in a very prominent convent school, and I completed my Masters in education from a well-known university, I never heard or read about the term “advocacy” or “parental advocacy.”

Therefore, I think (hopefully), my project will be a platform for new knowledge in the field of special education in India. Initially, parents will learn how they can help in making and implementation of policies related to their involvement in education of their children, both in papers and actual practice. Then they would learn what advocacy is, why they should advocate, and what they can get from those advocacy efforts as other parents worldwide have achieved through this process. Additionally, parents will be able to know what sources of support are available and can use from other countries to make that difference in the lives of their special children.

**Personal realizations.** Throughout the process of forming this website, I have learned that parental advocacy has resulted in many positive outcomes at micro and macro level of education of children with special needs. It begs to question that if parental advocacy is that helpful, why have not Indian researchers or government taken any initiative to work on this? While delving into the categories of special needs, I got to know that there is very limited number of categories of special needs, among which most are physical needs. Unfortunately, I
got to know that while addressing the needs of special children, most of the articles and
documents published by government of India used the word he/she for the person with special
needs, which clarifies the ignorance of any kind of third gender in the policies. Not only this, the
use of word “disability” is much more common rather than word special needs in the policies,
documents, or constitutional Acts. All these concerns made me feel more curious about the entire
education system there and left me thinking for days about the future of children with special
needs living in my country.

My hope for this website is that it will be a platform for every single person associated
with the education of children with special needs. Even teachers can help parents understand
what advocacy is and what they can do as parents in India for their children with special needs in
terms of education. The website does discuss the need for parental advocacy. Rather, the website
may encourage parents to start advocating for their children. There is variety of information for
parents on how to advocate, what advocates do, who can be advocate, what barriers they might
face, strategies to be effective advocates, and articles and training programs related to parental
advocacy, so that parents could not only read, but learn from the experiences of other parents and
could relate. Therefore, it was necessary to create a website instead of handbook or workshop so
that I could be in touch with those, who want to begin and are just waiting for some external
support.

**Limitations**

Unfortunately, like any other research paper or project, this project also has some
limitations relating to the content, application, vocabulary and completion. Some of these
limitations are as follows:
Content. This project targets parents in India; however, the literature reviewed in this paper represent the experiences of parents who are not from India. This could be seen as a limitation as the audience of the project is Indian parents struggling for the education of their children with special needs. As we all know that all the countries have different cultures, different education systems, different financial situation of their citizens, and different perception towards education of their children. So, there might be difference in barriers faced by Indian parents while advocating for the educational needs of their children. While keeping this in mind, in the future I would like to conduct research on the experiences of Indian parents while they advocated for the education of their special children. This would provide me with the clear picture of the reality of the situation is in India and where I need to begin from to provide them with a platform for being effective advocates.

Application of project. As stated above, the same barriers were assumed to apply to Indian parents have been found to apply to the general situation of parents and general behaviour of parents towards their children, teachers, administrators or schools and the financial situation of developing countries. This ultimately brings into question whether the findings from the literature review can be applicable to Indians. This is an important consideration since there are differences in the education systems as well as the role and involvement parents have in the education of their children with special needs. For instance, IDEIA clearly outlines the role of parents and their involvement; however, in India, none of the policies clearly states the role of parents. An interesting fact is that Indian Education system does not have an Individualised Education Plan (IEP), which is considered the most important document of education of children with special needs. Most of the parents have knowledge about IEP and are trained by government or organisations for attending the IEP meetings, which is not possible in India.
Vocabulary. Adding to the previous limitations, the use of some words are also a limitation in this project. For instance words like “mental retardation”, “disabled”, or “physically handicapped”, which are unacceptable in some countries, are still used in Indian policies and assessment procedures. It was really hard for me to address those students with special needs using such words.

Completion. Last but not the least the major limitation I feel is my satisfaction with the entire project upon final reflection. I still feel that the topic I have chosen would benefit with some research first on the experience of parents—such as finding out what they know about parental advocacy is and how it can make lives of their children better, how they feel about advocacy, which obstacles are they facing in starting this journey of advocacy and if they have started it, and what barriers are they facing. Perhaps this is a future step. After getting the answers of all these questions, I could revisit this project again, and come up with something more clear and more practical solutions.

Implications

Parental Advocacy has never been a topic of research in India which makes it obvious that my website will be the only source of reaching people associated with the education of children with special needs that is teachers, school administrators, policy makers and researchers.

Teachers. From my experience of working with teachers in India, I have come to know that they are way far away from the knowledge required to deal with children with special needs. Many of them have rarely heard the word “parental advocacy.” After going through the information provided on the website, they will start thinking about this topic and will be equipped with the knowledge to start helping parents in getting their journey started. For instance, teachers may start educating parents on how they can get the required laws, policies,
and resources in place so that their children could reach their full potential. Moreover, when it comes to parent-teacher relationship and parent-school dynamics as barriers to effective advocacy, the strategies provided in the website may initiate a strong relationship between teachers and parents and understanding their concerns without any conflict.

Along with this, teachers will start having a better understanding of the perspective of parents and the concerns parents. This can allow teachers to act as catalyst between the parent and the school professionals involved in the education of children with special needs. Moreover, the knowledge and importance of having an IEP for all the children with special needs would help teachers setting different goals and track the achievement of these goals, make adaptations and modifications in advance and use resources to help them teach the children with different needs.

**Policy makers.** When it comes to policy makers, the people who are totally responsible for the educational rights of children with special needs, this website will be a boon. First of all, there is a dire need of classification of all special needs categories along with detailed definition as it is very clear from the website that Indian Planning Commission just has some specific categories with a little description and missing major terms such as autism and behavioural needs. So, there should be only one manual for education of children with special needs including all categories for special needs using the world-wide acceptable vocabulary for those children. Then it comes to making policies. For instance, IDEA and parental advocacy, which is included in the website, sheds light on the role and involvement of parents in the education of special children. This, therefore, shows a path to policy makers to get started with the change in policies and framework which clearly states the rights and duties of parents in India.
I hope that the introduction of any law like IDEA would motivate the parents to start this journey for their children. The introduction of IEP’s, which is the most important document for the education of children with special needs, is also possible with the help of this website. When parents, teachers and policy makers would get to know about the importance of having an IEP for all the children with special needs, it is very possible to make it mandatory by the government of India.

**Researchers.** Research is not only the solution of the existing problem but it can also initiate revolution in any system. This website could serve to remind Indian researchers of the importance of this area interest—which could benefit the education system. The comparison with other developing or developed countries would encourage the researchers to find out where Indian system in lagging behind in the reforms to be made for children with special needs, keeping in mind the expectations, role and involvement of parents in the education of their children with special needs.

**School Administrators.** School administrators play the role of mediator between policy makers, teachers, students, and parents. It is the responsibility of government to make and enforce laws, rights and policies but it is in the hands of school administrators to make it sure that their school is at their best in making these possible in every possible way. This website highlights the importance of school-based team in assessment of children with special needs. School-based teams (SBT) are collaborative problem-solving groups of professionals within each school comprised of: school administrators, learning assistant teachers, counsellors, behaviour-support teachers, resource teachers, regular classroom teachers, sometimes parents, speech-language pathologists, occupational physical therapists, teachers for hearing impaired, literacy support teachers, district behaviour specialists, school psychologists, and teachers for visually
impaired. Even if it is not mandatory by the government of India, schools can still afford to have a school-based team on their own for the better opportunities and resources for children with special needs.

**Conclusion**

This topic was not something I always wanted to do. My experience with the parent advocates in my classroom, who came as resources person during my course made it very clear about their importance, and encouraged me to recognize what Indian parents missing. In order to get answers to these questions, it was necessary to delve into the entire concept of advocacy. It began form the concept of advocacy and its situation in India, and ended up as a first step towards the journey of parental advocacy in Indian education system. Overall, this project will contribute to the research concerning special needs. Specifically, it will examine the role of parents as advocates. The aim for this entire project is to encourage Indian parents to start advocating for the education of their children with special needs, and to provide them with the basic skills and knowledge which they need to be effective advocates.
References


Appendix A

Project Website Link- http://parentaladvocacy.in/