


Chapter 10

Reconceptualizing Inclusive Education as a Social Justice Imperative

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has increasingly taken the shape of one of the dominant pedagogical approaches though a major requirement of a social justice premised on human rights, equity and dignity. This chapter reinvents the idea of inclusive education as a concept of social justice, and the ways education systems may move beyond extremely narrow models of integration, to the radical forms of addressing the persistent inequalities. The chapter employs critical theories of inclusion, intersectionality and equity to explain the determination by policy, pedagogy and institutional structures that determine access, participation and belonging of different learners. It highlights the role of teachers, the systems of governance and society in the achievement of inclusive and equity-based learning. The chapter highlights the need of structural change putting the inclusive education within the perspective of moral and social responsibility where it will take some structural change in the long run to bring meaningful inclusion among all learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inclusive Education in Contemporary Educational Discourse

Inclusive education has become a key idea in the modern educational discourse as the world has been committed to equality, human rights, and inclusion, or democratic involvement. Originally conceived as a strategy that incorporates learners with disabilities into the mainstream education system, inclusive education has over time been extended to include a new vision of learning that considers the population of all marginalized and underrepresented learners. This development represents increased realization of the fact that disability is not the only aspect of exclusion in education but it is closely connected with socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, language, geography, and migration status (Affleck et al., 1988).

Although the policy and the rhetoric surrounding inclusive education have gained considerable support, the implementation of this education is usually limited and disjointed. Most education systems still exist under the framework of continuing to favor the Anglo-American fading emerging paradigm of a normative type of learner, standardized learning, and competitive forms of assessment. Such structures may unconsciously recreate inequalities through the inability to support the use of various learning needs and cultures. Consequently, inclusion is often accomplished by only physical access or location but not by significant involvement and membership.

To overcome the challenge of reconceptualizing inclusive education, it will be necessary to depart with the superficial inclusive education to perceptive systemic change. This requires questioning the values, assumptions and power dynamics within the institutions of education. When based on social justice, inclusive education questions deficit-oriented views and attempts to make changes to educational settings, which see diversity as a strength instead of a deficit-related issue. This expanded conceptualization removes inclusive education as an accommodative rather than an individual act of duty (Braaten et al., 1988).

1.2 Inclusion Through the Prism of Social Justice

The concept of inclusive education taken through the social justice prism also requires a clear attitude towards the relations of power inherent in educational frameworks. Schools are not a level playing field, they mirror larger hierarchies within the society in terms of class, caste, race, gender, disability, as well as language. These hierarchies influence the curriculum options, discipline, language of instruction and assessment, and usually favor the powerful groups, at the expense of other groups. Social justice approach to inclusion hence demands a critical

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