

WORKSHOP 2

Quality Education and Social Inclusion

Co-organization and financing: Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture - OEI

Participants in the panel, moderator and rapporteur: list will be distributed during the Conference

Discussion Paper: IBE, in collaboration with OEI and UNESCO

Additional Paper: OEI

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WORKSHOP 2

Quality Education and Social Inclusion

Introductory video:

Workshop 2 A and 2 B: *« Youth as constructors of peace towards an inclusive society » (Colombia)*

For more than five decades, Colombians have been living through different levels and modalities of societal conflict and violence, of which youth have been not only affected but also implicated. *« Conflict Resolution for Adolescents » (Jóvenes Constructores y Constructoras de paz)* is a project developed by Foster Parents Plan in partnership with the International Centre of Education and Human Development (CINDE) in Colombia, as an effort to reinforce social inclusion by training and encouraging adolescents to be peace builders. Participation of young people is the core of this initiative. This film points out the main concerns of the youth and also illustrates the guiding principles of the project and how it is being implemented.

Discussion Paper

“Focusing special efforts in the most disadvantaged communities sends the signal that quality education is for all.”¹

1. Social inclusion, exclusion, and education

Current international concern with social inclusion has emerged in response to the challenges posed by persistent and increasing marginalisation, discrimination, and exclusion of vulnerable groups in all societies. Consequently, any discussion of social inclusion cannot be separated from a serious consideration of social exclusion. As inter-related and multidimensional processes, inclusion and exclusion

“describe how people’s opportunities for full and meaningful participation in the main spheres of social life may be differentially facilitated or blocked. These processes, in turn, contribute to unequal prospects that people have to achieve socially and economically valued resources, capacities, and credentials.”²

¹ Final communiqué of the Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education (Paris, 4 October 2003).

² Canadian Council on Social Development

Central to this discussion of the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion, formal education plays a complex and sometimes contradictory role. On one hand, public schooling often serves as an effective vehicle for overcoming marginalisation and enhancing inclusion into citizenship, work and other spheres of social participation. On the other education systems are often seen to contribute to the perpetuation of socio-economic disparities, as well as to forms of discrimination based on such factors as gender, age, health, residence and minority status.

Q1. *How to reinforce the role of education as an effective vehicle for overcoming marginalisation and enhancing inclusion; instead of its impact to the perpetuation of disparities?*

2. Quality education for social inclusion

While the traditional conception of inclusive education aims at the mainstream participation of individual learners with special educational needs, concern with social inclusion focuses on *all* learners. Indeed, many vulnerable groups of children and youth, including girls and young women, those who are working, who are forced to seek refuge or are displaced, orphans, those who belong to linguistic, cultural or religious minorities, and those living in situations of extreme poverty, insecurity and of conflict, and those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, continue to be excluded from quality education. Additionally, little attention has been paid to a new kind of vulnerability, that results from the inability of well-educated people coming from medium or even high-income backgrounds to insert themselves productively and/or socially in the society, generating the so-called *disaffiliation*³.

It is now recognised that the challenge of achieving education for all is not solely one of access and initial enrolment, but also of regular attendance, retention, attainment and achievement. This implies not only that marginalized and vulnerable groups of children and youth actually have equitable access to educational opportunities, but also, that equitable participation in quality education be ensured for all individual learners and groups. Moreover, a social inclusion perspective on quality education is also concerned with the need to ensure that learning opportunities contribute to effective inclusion of individual and groups of youth into the wider socio-economic, civic and cultural fabric of society.

Quality education is therefore an education that is inclusive. It is an education that aims at the full participation by all learners, teaches attitudes and behaviours of tolerance and is therefore a vehicle for the construction of an inclusive and participative economy and society. Concern with educational inclusion cannot be dissociated from the need to ensure relevant quality education as a vehicle for the construction of an inclusive and participative society. Focusing on quality education for enhanced social inclusion implies identifying strategies for overcoming or eliminating the barriers to full participation in quality education for individuals and groups which experience discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion or which are particularly vulnerable.

³ Castel, R. (1991) « De l'indigence à l'exclusion. La désaffiliation » in Donzelot, J (org.) *Face à l'exclusion de modèle français*, Esprit : Paris.

- Q2.** *Which are the groups that need to be particularly addressed to achieve quality education for all young people (12-18/20 years old)? Is it enough to address them, or should a policy to promote inclusive education also address adolescents and young people coming from upper-medium and high-income backgrounds? Why and how?*
- Q3.** *Are there general dimensions that have to be addressed to guarantee quality education for all young people (12-18 years old), or should each marginalized and vulnerable group be reached through different strategies?*

3. Framing a social inclusion perspective on quality education

In focusing on the quality of education from a social inclusion perspective, it is important to consider the inputs, processes, and environments that surround and foster, or hamper, learning, in order to ensure that the various components of education are sensitive to social inclusion and to each key group in each context. A number of dimensions of quality may thus be considered both at the level of the learner in her or his learning environment and at the level of the system that creates and supports the learning experience. Learning for social inclusion may thus be approached at the level of (1) the learners and their backgrounds, (2) the learning environment and the schooling process, as well as at the level of (3) the structures and policies of the education system.

3.1. The learners and their backgrounds

Educational opportunities must be available without discrimination. Diverse aspects related to their living conditions and to their culture have to be considered. Young people affected by HIV/AIDS, orphans, isolated populations, internally displaced persons and refugees, young people living in conflict and post-conflict situations, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, migrants and the new “job nomads” are usually living under particular conditions. Furthermore, many of the adolescents and young people coming from those groups bring to the educational institutions a diversity of cultures, learning styles, approaches and perspectives that might either enrich learning and add value to inclusion or force them into failure, according to the capability of the education systems, schools and teachers to take advantage of that diversity.

- Q4.** *What does it mean to take the diverse contexts into account by planning and developing educational opportunities for inclusion? How can poor living conditions be compensated through powerful educational environments?*
- Q5.** *How and to what extent do diverse educational institutions for adolescents and young people have to take advantage of the diversity of cultures, learning styles, approaches and perspectives from traditionally marginalized or vulnerable groups of the population?*

3.2. The learning environment and the schooling process

To take the learner's background into account means to address the issues of learning contents, processes and learning environments in a very different way as it was done in the past. In the past it was thought that the learning contents, processes and environments had to be homogeneous and could be defined in an abstract way. In fact, diverse problems arose. In many cases the learning contents were biased. Stereotyping, or mono cultural and monolingual approaches were – and still are – widespread. The concern with the relevance of learning content to changing societal realities and needs was insufficient. Nowadays there are many efforts to promote the integration of rights education, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and preventive education, respect for human dignity and diversity and also concepts and skills linked to the emergent new economy. However, these efforts are still not always reflected in the day-by-day educational practices in schools for adolescents and young people. Perhaps one of the reasons for this imbalance between innovation in the prescribed learning contents and reality might be that processes of education are an often overlooked dimension of quality. How knowledge, skills, competencies, values and attitudes are transmitted and shaped are as important as the content of the officially prescribed curriculum.

Finally, updating educational contents and improving educational processes only will be effective if the learning environment is also improved accordingly to the needs of each context. Both the physical environment of learning (adequate attention paid to the promotion of physical and mental health, safety and security), as well as the psycho-social environment of learning (absence of gender or minority discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment) will enable or hinder learning the needed contents through the adequate processes to form competencies for inclusion thanks to inclusive education.

Q6. Some of the internal barriers to effective access and continuous participation in quality education include inadequate contents, inadequate processes, poor learning environments. How can these three dimensions be improved? What are the lessons learned out of many existing good practices to eradicate violence from schools as a way of promoting inclusion in schools? What are, in a more particular way, the lessons learned from experiences such as peer-education, conflict-resolution projects and opening schools for extra-curricular projects?

Q7. Learning contents, processes and environments can be – at least partially – defined at schools. Is it enough to improve quality education at the level of each educational institution to guarantee inclusive education for inclusion?

3.3. System structures and policies

To promote inclusive education there is probably also a need to improve the social and educational legal framework and to see how to cope with some new trends in the evolution of educational structures and governance.

A sustainable legislative framework that enables the realisation of the right to education for all is needed in all the countries. This may involve forms of compensatory or

affirmative action to ensure equitable educational opportunities for those individuals and groups negatively affected by discrimination. Those affirmative actions should also involve educational processes and not only the provision of the necessary material conditions for schooling, such as adequate spaces, textbooks and other learning materials.

Segregation of educational opportunities is an increasing trend in many countries. The increasing number of private secondary schools being created clearly illustrates this fact. Such institutions are frequently built to attend to the specific demands of parents who want their children to be educated among people coming from the same social level, sharing the same values and cultural backgrounds. Some people have interpreted this phenomenon as an exercise of the right to diversity and the freedom of choice. Nevertheless, one of the points highlighted during the 46th ICE was that diversity alone does not guarantee social cohesion. Indeed, the risk that such a trend contributes more to extend segregation after education, instead of social inclusion, is high. If social inclusion is to be taken into consideration, then a change of attitude would seem to be required, turning from a demand-based approach to a need-based one. Additionally, it is necessary that the most privileged of the society – who are usually also at the top of the decision-making process – be willing to act towards social integration.

Last, but not least, the marginalized and vulnerable populations are not always consulted or included in the search for good alternatives for ensuring the quality of education for social inclusion. However, it seems that the degree of consultation and stakeholder participation in policy dialogue, formulation and implementation and linkages to other sector policies (health, youth, labour, finance, etc), are both very important to guarantee quality education for all adolescents and young people, particularly for those under conditions of marginalisation and vulnerability.

Q8. What changes might be needed in the legislation to promote inclusive education?

Q9. How can inclusive education be promoted if the education systems are more and more segregated? How can immigrants be educated for inclusion in a high competitive world economy, if they are schooled separately from the local population? How can local wealthy adolescents want and know how to include all, if they are also educated separately from the vulnerable groups of students?

Q10. What good strategies are there to promote the active participation of the marginalized and vulnerable groups of adolescents and young people (12-18) and their groups of reference in the process of developing high quality education for them and for all? What are the lessons learned from the many existing good practices?

Q11. How do we measure inclusion in education? How can we measure social inclusion as an outcome?