

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE), organized by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE), will take place in Geneva from 25 to 28 November 2008 on the theme of *"Inclusive education: the way of the future"*.

In his invitation letter, the Director-General of UNESCO stressed that the theme of this session is closely linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as the objectives of Education for All (EFA). He recalled that the High-Level Group on EFA, meeting in Dakar in December 2007, reaffirmed the fact that: *"achieving the EFA goals means reaching those children, youth and adults, especially girls and women, who have hitherto been excluded from basic education opportunities."* He furthermore concluded that *"Quality education is, therefore, an education that is inclusive and that aims at the full participation of all learners, regardless of gender, social and economic status, ethnicity/race, geographical location, special learning needs, age and religion."*

To design and implement policies that actually attain "inclusive education" requires significant efforts throughout the world and often represents an indisputable challenge. Ministers of Education and other partners in the education system may nevertheless base their actions on a certain number of more or less recent international legal texts. Here are the principal ones:¹

- 1948: the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* ensures the right to free elementary education for all children (Article 26);
- 1960: the *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education*;
- 1989: the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, furthermore, ensures the right of all children not to be discriminated against when receiving education;
- 1990: the *World Declaration on Education for All* (Jomtien) strengthened the idea of basic education for all, satisfying essential learning needs;
- 1993: the *UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* not only affirms the equal rights of all children, youth and adults with disabilities to education but also states that education should be provided in "integrated school settings" and in "general school settings."
- 1994: the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* stipulates that (para. 3) "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups";
- 2000: the *World Education Forum's Framework for Action*, Dakar, and the Millennium Development Goals ensure that all children have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education by 2015; the focus is placed on marginalized groups and girls;
- 2001: UNESCO launched its *EFA Flagship Programme* on the right to education for persons with disabilities: towards inclusion;
- 2006: On 13 December the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the *Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities*, of which Article 24 is specifically devoted to education (absence of discrimination; equality of opportunity; inclusion in education at all levels, particularly primary education; educational opportunities throughout life aimed at facilitating the full development of their human potential, sense of dignity and self-worth; strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; the development by persons with disabilities of their personality; their effective participation in a free society with a view to their full integration, etc.).

It would therefore seem that, even if this concept might give the impression of being of recent date or even new, it has now been several decades since the international community provided itself with significant legal instruments which, by stressing the right of ALL children to benefit from an education without discrimination, express — implicitly or explicitly — the concept of "inclusive education".

¹ See UNESCO, *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*, Paris, 2005, pp. 12–14.

“Achieving the right to education is the foundation for building a truly inclusive society, where all people learn together and participate equally. Yet today, over 77 million children are not enrolled in school and more than 781 million adults are deprived of literacy. Such exclusion is particularly acute among persons with disabilities. About 97% of adults with disabilities do not have basic literacy skills. Estimates of the number of disabled children attending school in developing countries range from less than 1% to 5%. Disabled children count for over one-third of all out-of-school children. It is clear that we cannot achieve the Education for All Goals or the MDGs without taking into account the special needs of the estimated 650 million persons — 10% of the world’s population — with disabilities. In addition to those excluded from access to education, there are countless others marginalized within the school system. Here, educational aspirations are still oftentimes blocked by traditional models of learning that fail to respond to the needs of our rapidly changing world. Providing quality education for all remains one of the biggest development challenges of our time. Yet, with effective legislation and policies it is possible to build a world of inclusion. Awareness-raising will move us in that direction. (...). So we undertake both efforts — to raise awareness and to develop effective policies for a World for Inclusion. It is our shared responsibility to turn those dreams, those visions, that commitment into tangible reality”.

Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, May 2007

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

To choose the theme of a ministerial conference bringing together representatives of the entire world is always a difficult task. In fact, it requires finding a topic of sufficient importance and pertinence that is the subject of widespread interest on a global level² that can set in motion profitable discussions, that raises awareness, that opens up new paths for reflection and that is sufficiently stimulating to guide political action and progress within Member States. In proposing the theme of this 48th session of the ICE: **“Inclusive Education: the Way of the Future”**, the IBE Council, the Executive Board and the General Conference of UNESCO wished to communicate a double message to the international educational community. This does not represent a doubt but a certainty: first, societies and education systems that function, as is still sometimes the case today, with numerous forms of exclusion are neither acceptable nor feasible; second, given this situation, if past and present ways of confronting them still exist, they cannot be the ways of the future and require a complete “paradigm shift” in conception and a long-term vision so as to create and introduce new policies.

It is therefore an ambitious theme for it offers an opportunity to envisage in-depth changes within education systems while, despite its importance, it also presents a certain number of risks. Is it illusory to imagine finding a common language, to forge a global consensus and to establish common views on improving policies in 193 Member States, when their situations are so diverse? We know, for example, that in developing countries 90% of disabled children and young people do not have access to education and they are, to employ UNICEF’s terminology, “invisible children”. While, in many countries, the policy of integrating the disabled into mainstream classes is at present under review after several decades of implementation, this same policy has never been applied or even envisaged in several other

² With a view to the preparation of the ICE, some ten regional seminars organized by the IBE, in the framework of its Community of Practices for curriculum developers, have allowed these preoccupations to be assessed. The documents and reports of these meetings are accessible online on the IBE’s website: www.ibe.unesco.org

parts of the world. Is it possible to progress, basing ourselves on the international legal texts summed up in the introductory section to this document, when we know that “*Ratification of international treaties implies that governments translate the provisions into national legislation and enforce this legislation. However, of a total of 173 countries recently reporting, 38 – one in five – have no provisions in their constitutions mandating free and compulsory primary schooling, and the proportion rises to one in three if North America and Western Europe are excluded.*”³ Given the challenge of constructing a truly inclusive society, do ministries of education, despite their political will, really have available sufficient power and the technical means to make things change? Is it possible to go beyond simple but well-meaning speeches and declarations of intent?

Nevertheless, “*knowledge and education are increasingly considered as key factors in sustainable development and economic growth. The Ministers of Education of almost 100 countries attending the round-table on Education and Economic Development, held in Paris on 19 and 20 October 2007 on the occasion of the thirty-fourth session of the General Conference of UNESCO, reaffirmed their commitment to quality education as a right for everyone, **an education that is inclusive,**⁴ fosters equity and gender equality, and is a force for social stability, peace and conflict resolution.*”⁵

According to its mandate, UNESCO’s mission is to support the efforts of Member States in providing education to all of their citizens, but particularly those who have been marginalized or excluded from the system, in order to bring an end to discrimination in terms of their access, their active participation and their success at all levels of education. An international conference, such as the one that will bring together representatives of the whole world in Geneva in November 2008, assumes its full meaning when situations are different, opinions differ and it is a question of constructing together a new approach, based on an honest and thorough appraisal of situations, on exchanges and the sharing of experience, as well as on a common will to construct a better world. The 48th session of the ICE therefore represents a superb challenge — in particular that of renewing the Dakar commitments for inclusion at the heart of the EFA objectives — and a unique occasion to advance education in the world.

THE CONTEXT

The main working document of the conference (ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3), which will be sent to Member States and invited organizations at least six weeks before the beginning of the ICE, will adopt an in-depth approach to the questions and main themes for discussion during this 48th session. The purpose of this general overview document for the conference is not therefore to deal in detail with each one of the sub-themes, but simply to establish some indicators for reflection so as to give an opportunity for ministers and their colleagues to reflect now about the Conference and to prepare themselves for it, with the idea of inspiring some interesting debates. Indeed, the concept of inclusive education is far from being obvious and understood by everybody; the same is true of the policy and educational consequences that the concept implies. Thus, this document will attempt to throw a certain amount of light on such questions as: What is the relationship between inclusive education, society and democracy? What does the concept of inclusive education cover? How has it evolved? Who

³ EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2008, *Education for All by 2015: will we make it? Summary report*. Paris, UNESCO, 2007, p. 10.

⁴ Our emphasis.

⁵ See in particular Ministerial Round Table on Education and Economic Development *Communiqué*, 34th session of the UNESCO General Conference, Paris, October 2007 ; see also *Strategy of the IBE, 2008-2013*, Geneva, IBE-UNESCO, 2008, p. 6.

in the main are the excluded? What changes are implied by policies for inclusive education? Can an inclusive school really exist? In which direction should we go in order to advance and introduce policies and practices for inclusive education?

A ministerial conference also offers the opportunity for a better understanding of the present state of our knowledge and, in this way, to validate and sanction the work carried out by UNESCO and other institutions — international, regional, national or academic. In fact, the resources are abundant and beneficial, as much in the field of inclusive education⁶ as that of curriculum development⁷ or in the fight against poverty⁸. It is mainly on the whole range of these subjects that the following information and ideas are based.

In order to guarantee the greatest momentum and to avoid fragmentation, the IBE Council wished that the conference should take place in a **sequential** manner (see the organizational chart in Annex II). This would enable different aspects to be dealt with one after another, beginning with the concept of society itself (inclusive or not), putting forward a global vision (conceptual framework), first looking at the “macro” level (public policies), the “meso” level (education systems) and then the “micro” level (teaching and learning practices), finally exploring the question of how we may proceed in the future. According to this approach, we adopt a very broad perspective and anticipate possible actions in the short, medium and long term as a way of proceeding.

1. Inclusion, society and democracy

Inclusion is not in the first place a matter of education or teaching, but concerns the respect of human rights that affect primarily the directions of general policies in a country. It is therefore inseparable from the way in which the society itself is conceived or well-being is desired and the way in which “living together” is viewed. Social justice, social inclusion and inclusive education would seem to be inextricably linked. The tendency towards an inclusive society would seem to be the basic foundation of sustainable social development. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that inclusion represents a good measure of the democratic health of a country. In fact the value of a democracy is measured by the way it treats its minorities and marginalized populations — whatever their characteristics and status — and its attempts to provide them with greater autonomy so that they may participate fully in social life.

*“Exclusion from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of communities is one of the greatest problems facing individuals in our society today. Such societies are neither efficient nor desirable”.*⁹ According to the definition of the well-known Indian, Nobel-Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen:¹⁰ *“Inclusion is characterised by widely shared social experience and active participation in society, by widespread equality of opportunities and life chances available to people on the individual level and by all citizens reaching an elementary level of well-being.”*

The present situation in the world shows that we are still very far from these realities and that the construction of an inclusive society is, obviously, based on an ideal and cannot, therefore,

⁶ See in particular *Guidelines for inclusion: ensuring access to education for all*, Paris: UNESCO, 2005; see also *Open file on inclusive education: support materials for managers and administrators*, Paris: UNESCO, 2003.

⁷ Documents available from the website of the IBE: www.ibe.unesco.org

⁸ The main outcomes of the project carried out by the IBE in Africa over the last four years and entitled *Analysis and curricular innovations of Education for All and the struggle against poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa* are available on line from the IBE’s website; they will also appear as the content of a forthcoming issue of the review *Prospects*.

⁹ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰ Amartya Sen, *Development as freedom*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001.

be conceived as an on-going process of which education is one of the components and, for some people, the “cornerstone”. *“Education must be viewed as a facilitator in everyone’s human development and functionality, regardless of barriers of any kind, physical or otherwise. Therefore, disability of any kind (physical, social and/or emotional) cannot be a disqualifier. Inclusion, thus, involves adopting a broad vision of Education for All by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion.”*¹¹ As is emphasized in UNESCO’s *Guidelines for inclusion*: *“While there are also very important human, economic, social and political reasons for pursuing a policy and approach of inclusive education, it is also a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations”*¹². It is indeed reasonable to think that children who “learn together” also learn to “live together”.

Furthermore, the quality of education should not be measured simply in terms of the acquisition of learning or competences, but also by the yardstick of human rights and equity: *“Some attributes of a high-quality learning process have achieved independent status as part of the definition of education quality. Most centrally, these can be summarized as the need for education systems to be equitable, inclusive and relevant to local circumstances. Where the access to or the process of education is characterized by gender inequality, or by discrimination against particular groups on ethnic or cultural grounds, the rights of individuals and groups are ignored. Thus, education systems that lack a strong, clear respect for human rights cannot be said to be of high quality. By the same token, any shift towards equity is an improvement in quality.”*¹³

The search for equity should therefore be placed at the heart of constructing an inclusive society. According to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), educational equity signifies two dimensions: *“The first is fairness, which implies that ensuring personal and social circumstances — for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin — should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, which implies assuring a basic minimum standard of education for all — for example, that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation which often causes school failure. [...] Fair and inclusive education is one of the most powerful levers available to make society more equitable. [...] Equity in education enhances social cohesion and trust.”*¹⁴

2. Education is everyone’s business ... And inclusion?

To assert, as the Dakar Forum did, that “education is everyone’s business” is much more than a slogan or a well-considered statement. It reflects the real situation and one may observe increasingly that, in those countries where investment in education represents a major commitment not only by the ministry of education but by the entire range of concerned partners — all the public authorities at the national, regional and local levels, teachers, parents, civil society, religious authorities, businesses, the media, development partners, etc.— progress in terms of access, equity, quality and efficiency are more prominent and more long-lasting. As the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report emphasized for the most successful countries: *“While there are no universal recipes, a robust long-term vision for*

¹¹ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹² Op. cit., p. 13.

¹³ *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005: the quality imperative*, Paris: UNESCO, 2004., chap. 6.

¹⁴ Field, S., Kuczera, M., Pont, B., *No more failures: ten steps to equity in education*, Paris: OECD, 2007, p. 11.

education, strong government leadership and a motivated, well-supported teaching corps are conditions for successful qualitative reforms.”¹⁵

Even more so, given its cross-cutting and societal dimension, inclusion can only be “everyone’s business”. An inclusive society can only be the outcome of all State policies — those of health, those of the economy and employment, those of immigration and even those of town and country planning. Why, then, do we place so much stress on education? Simply because education systems reflect the image of societies and are an important vehicle for their transformation. Ministries of education and the other partners involved are located at the forefront of implementing policies encouraging or restricting inclusion. We know that education can be an important tool for inclusion, but we also know that an education system can equally be “a mechanism for exclusion”. Alone, ministries of education have only limited room for manoeuvre, but these possibilities are multiplied when action is based on a true institutionalized and on-going policy dialogue, based on partnerships and forming part of coherent, focused and long-term governmental action. In the EFA Global Monitoring Report devoted to “the quality imperative”, it is emphasized that the most successful countries have at least three characteristics in common: the quality of their teachers; the continuity of their policy; and a high level of public commitment to education “*which seems to emanate from a strong political vision.*”¹⁶

3. What definition for inclusion?

According to UNESCO’s *Guidelines for inclusion*, it is seen as: “**a process** of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. [...] Inclusion is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non-formal educational settings. Rather than being a marginal issue on how some learners can be integrated in mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems and other learning environments in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims towards enabling teachers and learners both to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment of the learning environment, rather than a problem.”¹⁷

Any definition of inclusion should highlight the following :

Inclusion is about: welcoming diversity; benefiting all learners, not only targeting the excluded; children in school who may feel excluded; providing equal access to education or making certain provisions for certain categories of children without excluding them.

Inclusion is not about: reforms of special education alone, but reform of both the formal and non-formal education system; responding only to diversity, but also improving the quality of education for all learners; special schools but perhaps additional support to students within the regular school system; meeting the needs of children with disabilities only; meeting one child’s needs at the expense of another child.

¹⁵ *Education for All: the quality imperative—summary*, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁶ *Education for All: the quality imperative*, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁷ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., pp. 13 & 15.

4. From integration to inclusion: the evolution of a concept

UNESCO's *Guidelines for inclusion* illustrate through a simple and meaningful diagram¹⁸ the phases marking the passage from educational exclusion to inclusion. In the first instance, consideration of the problem is simply refused (denial); in a second phase, if the situation is taken into consideration (acceptance), it is considered as taking place outside the system and segregational measures are adopted (initially based on charity and benevolence, subsequently institutionalized in the form of special education). The third phase is that of understanding, which leads to integration via education aligned with special needs. The fourth and final step, regarded as knowledge, is that of inclusion in education.

*“Inclusion as we know it today has its origins in Special Education. The development of the field of special education has involved a series of stages during which education systems have explored different ways of responding to children with disabilities, and to students who experience difficulties in learning. In some cases, special education has been provided as a supplement to general education provision, in other cases it has been entirely separate.”*¹⁹ In the last case, it has often occurred that the responsible ministries are different: the ministry of education has provided general education and the ministry of health or social affairs that of special education. *“In recent years, the appropriateness of separate systems of education has been challenged, both from a human rights perspective and from the point of view of effectiveness.”*²⁰

*“Special education practices were moved into the mainstream through an approach known as “integration”.*²¹ The attitude of this approach — and numerous research studies have confirmed the relevance of this procedure — is that children and young people with “special needs” make better progress when they are integrated in regular classes than in special schools, from the point of view of their intellectual, behavioural and social development. This procedure has become the rule in most developed countries. *“There is increasing recognition, especially in Europe, that it is preferable for children with special needs to be taught in regular schools, albeit with various forms of special support. In recent years several developing countries have taken initiatives to promote inclusive schools.”*²² Research has shown in fact that the advantages of inclusive education compared to special education are real.²³ Nevertheless, integration policies are far from receiving universal approval, even in developed countries; they often meet with resistance that is both “ideological” (the special education needs of children and young people evidently need to be taken in hand by specialists, outside regular education) and “corporate” (mainly on the part of special educators, reception centres, psychologists or even doctors).

We have to admit that the process of integration is very demanding and, to succeed, it requires a great deal of supporting measures (modifying the culture of teachers and other educational personnel, modifying the premises, teacher training, human resources, teaching materials, etc.). *“The main challenge with integration is that “mainstreaming” had not been accompanied by changes in the organisation of the ordinary school, its curriculum and teaching and learning strategies. This lack of organisational change has proved to be one of the major barriers to the implementation of inclusive education policies.”*²⁴

¹⁸ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?—Summary*, op. cit., p. 27

²³ See for example: *Education for All: the quality imperative*, op. cit., p. 145 (Box 4.2).

²⁴ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 9

5. Who are the victims of educational exclusion?

Educational exclusion may adopt various forms, more or less obvious or discreet. In the first place, the excluded are all those children and young people who simply **do not have access to education**; even if major progress has been achieved, there remain some 77 million children in the world who do not go to school, the majority of whom are girls. Next, the excluded are those who **drop out of the system early** without having attained a sufficient level of education. They are also the victims of **school failure**, which often takes place from the very first years of schooling and thereafter takes the form of a vicious circle, of which **repetition** — even if we know that it is nearly always pointless and expensive — is the “visible part of the iceberg”. The excluded are the children and young people who have “**special needs**” (mainly the physically and mentally handicapped). The excluded are also, according to the terminology of OECD, “**children and adolescents at risk**”, who often represent marginalized and particularly vulnerable groups (migrants, ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious minorities, the victims of poverty, street children, working children, refugee or displaced children, the children of nomads, HIV and AIDS orphans, victims of violence, etc.). To different degrees, the excluded are also — even in the most efficient and developed systems — all those children and young people for whom teaching and learning **do not satisfy their needs** and their hopes and, for this reason, have no meaning for their lives.

It would obviously be simplistic to assume that there is a single magic solution to overcome all of these forms of exclusion and which would promote the inclusion of each of these groups. In some countries, the problem affects the entire population; in others, attention has to be paid to certain particularly vulnerable groups (girls, the poor, ethnic minorities, migrants, etc.). Some people require measures specifically adapted to their situation (for medical, psychological or social reasons) but, in many other cases, it is the education system itself and the way it is organized that must be reassessed, questioned and modified.

6. New educational policies based on inclusion

The term “restructuring” is often used when it is a question of carrying out a thorough modification of an education system. This is a more suitable term than “renewal” or “reform”, which suggests that it is merely a matter of introducing some adjustments, whereas in fact a fundamental change is sought. This is particularly appropriate in the case of constructing policies for inclusive education, if it is our intention to offer real learning opportunities to children and young people, we must in the first place ask ourselves about the relevance of the present systems, their structures, their ways of functioning and even the philosophy behind them. A policy for inclusive education must obviously commence with an analysis and an in-depth examination of its present form. Everywhere in the world, education systems seem to continue functioning on the basis of “images” or “beliefs” inherited from the past or even a certain number of “myths” (such as that of the “average pupil” and that school failure is “natural” and normal or even the idea — often subconscious — that it is not the school that is made for the child but the opposite and, therefore, what we expect above all from a pupil is that, without fail, he/she will comply with the system). What teacher has not dreamed of finding himself/herself in front of a perfectly homogenous class, consisting only of good pupils who have a natural instinct for learning? Whereas the reality is quite different.

Given the limits of segregation policies (special education) and the difficulties of implementing integration policies, “*revised thinking has thus led to a re-conceptualisation of “special needs”*”. *This view implies that progress is more likely if we recognize that difficulties experienced by pupils result from the ways in which schools are currently organized and from rigid teaching methods. It has been argued that schools need to be reformed and pedagogy needs to be improved in ways that will lead them to respond positively to pupil diversity —*

seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning."²⁵ We find ourselves here at the heart of the fundamental problem which must guide the "paradigm change" required by inclusive education: **the diversity of pupils**, having always existed, is still considered most of the time to be a problem, while inclusive education requires that, from the very beginning, we accept this diversity as positive, as a resource and not as a hindrance to the "good" functioning of schools and classes.

In this perspective, *"UNESCO views inclusion as 'a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning.'* Therefore, the move towards inclusion is not simply a technical or organisational change but also a movement with a clear **philosophy**. In order for inclusion to be implemented effectively, countries need to define a set of inclusive principles together with practical ideas to guide the transition towards policies addressing inclusion in education. The principles of inclusion that are set out in various international declarations can be used as a foundation. These then can be interpreted and adapted to the context of individual countries."²⁶

From a policy point of view, this means that a holistic perspective should be adopted to change and reform the way in which education systems cope with exclusion. This implies a multi-sectoral or systemic approach to education and the introduction of coherent strategies to ensure long-lasting change at three critical levels: (a) policies and legislation; (b) attitudes within society and the community; and (c) teaching and learning practices, as well as in management and evaluation. This means a global strategy designed to take into consideration the inter-linked sources of exclusion that used to be considered separately, such as: poverty, social and cultural marginalization, sexual, linguistic or ethnic discrimination, disabilities and HIV and AIDS.

7. Inclusive education in practice

We are wary, and with good reason, of "models", particularly when these are so theoretical or idealistic as to be unattainable or when it is understood that they are transferable to other countries, regardless of the distance and the context. However, it could be interesting, when we ask ourselves about the concrete implementation of inclusive education, to ask ourselves: what are the features of a truly inclusive school? The following example has the advantage of arising out of the actual policies of a government, that of South Australia, which in close collaboration with all the other partners of the education system designed and introduced a *School Retention Action Plan/SRAP* — which affected 14,000 pupils — based on the principles of inclusive education as they were defined above. According to this Action Plan: *"Building quality relationships between all members of a school community is at the centre of inclusive schooling practices. An inclusive school will have a culture which promotes belonging and connectedness and where everyone feels as if they are treated as valued individuals. Inclusive schools are caring schools, valuing all school members, regardless of their cultural or socio-economic background, their physical and mental health, or their learning achievements and abilities."*²⁷ The document also presents sixteen features (or indicators) of inclusive schools, which enable us to imagine how this all operates in daily school life.

²⁵ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 9

²⁶ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁷ Government of South Australia, *Supporting young people's success—forging the links: learning from the School Retention Action Plan*, Adelaide: 2007, p. 15.

The main interests of such a “model” are, firstly, that it demonstrates that inclusive education is not a Utopian concept or an abstraction but can actually be carried out in daily life. Secondly, that the list of characteristics for such schools indicates clearly a series of indicators showing that, ultimately, the major players are still teachers. As stressed by UNESCO’s *Guidelines for inclusion*: “*Teachers, parents, communities, school authorities, curriculum planners, training institutes and entrepreneurs in the business of education are among the actors that can serve as valuable resources in support of inclusion. [...] Ideally, effective inclusion involves implementation both in school and in society at large. However, it is only rarely that such a symbiosis exists between the school and society. Thus, it is the regular teacher who has the utmost responsibility for the pupils and their day-to-day learning. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to ensure that school-accessible and child-centered programmes are elaborated, implemented and evaluated.*”²⁸

However, in reality, teachers often find themselves at a loss or even helpless. How have teachers been trained? How have they been recruited? Has an effort been made to attract people coming from disadvantaged, marginalized or at-risk groups to the teaching profession? During their training, have teachers had an opportunity to acquire an “inclusion culture”? Have they had an opportunity to actually work in such schools? Have they been encouraged to regard diversity as a valuable resource? Have they been taught to appreciate the real expectations and needs of their pupils? Has an attempt been made to equip them with the necessary skills and the methodological tools to take these needs into consideration, to establish teaching strategies in order to confront diversity? What support (human and material resources) can they count upon in their daily work? Are they encouraged and prepared to work in teams? Are they encouraged to abandon the attitude “me and my class” in favour of “us and our school”? Since inclusive education can never be acquired once and for all, how and by whom is their in-service training provided? These are open questions but they remain unavoidable if we expect a real change in practices at the level of the classroom.

8. How to proceed?

The sociology of change has taught us that, to succeed, political action must be based on three inseparable elements: KNOWLEDGE, WILL and POWER. Given the complexity associated with designing an education system based resolutely on inclusive education, its implementation requires a major effort. Despite an unambiguous overall vision (**why?**) and a clear political will (**what?**), those responsible for education are often at a loss when it comes to **how** to proceed. In such cases, learning from the experience of others, basing oneself on practices that work and using tools that have already been tried and tested might seem very advantageous. No doubt numerous “good practices” exist throughout the world, but they are often little known or even remain confidential. Another role for a conference bringing together the world’s ministers of education is to demonstrate the value of what exists and seems to work.

We have decided to present here, in conclusion, the main elements in the *Index for inclusion*,²⁹ prepared by the Centre of Studies for Inclusive Education (CSIE) by an international team of researchers, practitioners and other partners in the education system; this guide has already been widely used in several countries and in numerous schools and is freely available on the Internet in a range of languages.³⁰ Its most important qualities are without

²⁸ *Guidelines for inclusion*, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁹ Booth T.; Ainscow M. *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*, Bristol, UK: Centre of Studies for Inclusive Education, 2002.

³⁰ The Internet address is: www.eenet.org.uk; languages available include: Arabic, Basque, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Catalan, Castilian, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), Czeck, Danish, English (for Malta), French (Québec), German, Maltese, Portuguese (Brazil), Romanian, Serb, Spanish (Latin America) and Vietnamese.

doubt a systemic approach and a rigorous, concrete and detailed manner in tackling all the questions that may be asked and that need a solution when introducing a true system of inclusive education. Furthermore, it is itself “inclusive” inasmuch as it demands great personal involvement and active participation on the part of its users at all stages of the process. Unfortunately, it is not possible in the context of this present document to provide in detail the full wealth of this guide, but we hope that the following elements will stimulate the reader to look into the book in-depth.

Globally, the *Index* tackles the subjects of inclusion and exclusion through **three dimensions** intended to improve the school, which are inter-connected: (a) the creation of inclusive education **CULTURES**; (b) the development of inclusive school **POLICIES**; and (c) the organization of inclusive school **PRACTICES**. Taking these three dimensions into consideration either simultaneously or in parallel is important, but the authors stress the fact that the creation of a culture of inclusion represents the cornerstone of the whole process. This *Index* represents a remarkable working tool for educational authorities everywhere in the world. Extremely complete, based on solid reasoning and written in an easily understood language, it could easily become a real Plan of Action, based on a detailed “road map”, which would allow all those who wish to “progress towards more inclusive education” to introduce and to support in a progressive and concrete manner each stage in the change process at the school level.

Finally, it will be a pleasure for UNESCO to share with the participants of the 48th ICE the revised *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. The document, published in 2005, has been updated, based on the experiences of applying the Guidelines in the past few years as well as the knowledge gained through the consultation meetings and regional conferences leading up to the 48th ICE. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force as a UN Convention on 3 May 2008 upon receiving its 20th ratification, has been also taken into account in the revision. The objective of the Guidelines remains unchanged: to offer education policy-makers a policy tool to analyze the state of inclusion in education and plan strategies and actions for inclusion at system and school levels. UNESCO submits the Guidelines to the 48th ICE as a draft, so that the participants can discuss and provide feedback for further improvement and enrichment.

What has been written here is not intended to cover the subject exhaustively. The objective is simply to put forward some basic information intended to support and enrich the thinking of ministers and their colleagues so that the debates at the 48th session of the ICE can be open, productive, constructive and stimulating for action, so that the international community advances increasingly towards the ideal of “**a world fit for children**”³¹ — for **ALL** children, youth and adults.

³¹ According to the expression of UNICEF (May 2002).

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

The 48th session of the ICE is expected to contribute to an in-depth examination of the whole situation with a view to actions that may be undertaken. Thus, its main objectives are:

- To stimulate and to strengthen **international dialogue** on educational policies and practices; to **discuss in an open and in-depth manner** and to **share experiences** on the key questions connected with **inclusive education** and their implications in the preparation and introduction of equitable, effective and democratic educational policies of quality;
- To create a **common framework** which would take into account recent evolutions in the concept of inclusive education; to examine the **role of governments** in the development and introduction of policies for inclusive education; to identify those **education systems** that have successfully taken into account the diversity of pupils and that promote education throughout life and to stress the **critical role of teachers** in responding to the learners' educational expectations and needs.
- To identify **matters of agreement or of disagreement** and to **draw the lessons** for educational policy;
- To adopt **Conclusions** and **Recommendations** enabling individual, but above all local, national and international capacities, to be developed; to develop short-term and long-term **perspectives** on these matters so as to implement, everywhere in the world, **educational policies better adapted** both to the educational needs of society and to the socio-economic reality existing at this the beginning of the twenty-first century.

UNESCO's field of action gives the ICE a **global dimension** and it should gain the greatest benefit from what represents its value-added: the **inter-regional dimension**, thanks to which each region can profit from the experience of others.

THE CONFERENCE'S PROGRAMME

The official opening of the ICE will take place on **Tuesday, 25 November at 9:30 a.m.** The Conference's work will take place according to the agenda, the draft version of which is included in Annex I.

The Executive Board and the General Conference of UNESCO have asked the IBE and its Council to take into consideration the positive experiences gained during the two previous sessions of the ICE. Thus, the **general structure** (introductory and final debates, plenary sessions and workshops) has been retained (see the diagram in Annex II) and some improvements have been introduced in its organization and methodology.

The Conference's work will take place in the form of **an introductory debate** during a plenary session chaired by the Director-General of UNESCO, **four thematic workshops** followed by **summing-up plenary sessions** and a **final debate** in a plenary session. The introductory debate is entitled: *"From inclusive education to inclusive society"* and the final debate: *"Inclusive education: from vision to practice"*.

The Conference's **central theme**: “*Evidence-informed policy making: why we need it?*” will be dealt with during the **workshops** and the subsequent **two summing-up plenary sessions**. The themes adopted for the workshops are:

Workshop 1: ***Inclusive education: approaches, scope and content;***

Workshop 2: ***Inclusive education: public policies;***

Workshop 3: ***Inclusive education: systems, links and transitions;***

Workshop 4: ***Inclusive education: learners and teachers.***

In order to capitalize on the participation of delegates, their exchanges and an open discussion, the **first and second workshops** will take place consecutively in **four different rooms**; the **third and fourth workshops** will run in two parts simultaneously and in parallel **in two different rooms** (see the proposed structure of the 48th session of the ICE in Annex III).

Several organizations — international and national, governmental and non-governmental — have already expressed their interest and will participate in the organization and/or the financing of the workshops.

The Conference's main working document (**reference document**) will present the conceptual foundations and will tackle the main arguments for the whole of the ICE, as well as each one of the workshops. In conformity with UNESCO regulations, this document will be dispatched at least six weeks before the beginning of the meeting.

Each debate and each workshop will be organized in the form of a **discussion panel** (with three main speakers) in theory bringing together: two ministers and one representative of the other educational actors and partners (experts, teachers, representatives of civil society, etc.) selected in relation to the theme of the workshop. The discussions will be chaired by an experienced moderator; a rapporteur will be nominated for each workshop.

In all international proceedings, ministers frequently express the wish that their conferences could break away from a ritual that is often considered too formal, rigid and discouraging of open discussion. During the 48th session of the ICE — with its two debates, four workshops and two summing-up plenary sessions — the ministers and delegates will have broad and very varied opportunities to take the floor. They are invited to choose the themes that are of particular interest to them and to prepare **short speeches** pertinent to the themes being examined in such a way as to be able to react to the words of their colleagues. The IBE Council wishes that the ministers will become involved in a veritable interactive debate on creating and implementing policies for inclusive education and not merely on general theoretical concepts and frameworks. It is not therefore a matter of *making comments* on inclusive education, but rather of exchanging significant experiences and practices and discussing the best way of *advancing*.

Moreover, if they so wish, ministers may pass written contributions to the Secretariat that will be distributed during the Conference.

At the end of its work, the Conference will adopt its “**Conclusions and Recommendations**”. The latter document, which should be based essentially on the outcomes of the Conference — particularly the concluding debate — cannot be written and distributed beforehand. As during the two preceding sessions of the ICE, it will be largely prepared during the Conference by a limited editorial group, containing representatives of all the electoral groups.

Given the acknowledged success of the forty-sixth and forty-seventh sessions, the IBE Council wished once again to **give ministers the opportunity to express themselves** during the **preparatory phase** of the ICE by proposing that they should send a brief personal **“MESSAGE”** to the Conference, linked to the themes that will be discussed. These minister’s messages, accompanied by a photograph, will be published and exhibited, as well as being distributed to the Conference’s participants and the press; they will also be available on the ICE’s Internet site. An invitation letter on this subject will be sent to ministers before the summer.

Those requiring extra information may send their questions to: conference@ibe.unesco.org. It is also possible to contact the IBE by fax: (41) 22.917.78.01. Up-to date information is also available on the IBE’s website: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org>

OTHER EVENTS OCCURRING DURING THE ICE

The **Comenius Medal**, created jointly in 1992 by the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic and UNESCO, and intended to recognize original initiatives and achievements in the field of educational research and innovation, will be awarded by the Director-General of UNESCO to the recipients who have been selected among individuals, groups of educators or institutions.

Other special events will take place during the Conference: exhibitions, the presentation of programmes on the website, videos, etc. The detailed programme of special events will be published at the beginning of the Conference.

OTHER MEETINGS DURING THE ICE

Alongside the Conference’s work, various meetings may be organized during the ICE. The detailed programme will be compiled by as of October 2008.

DIAGRAM OF THE ICE

The draft diagram of the organization of the 48th session of the International Conference on Education is attached as Annex II. Apart from the first two days, the working hours will be from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

CONFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The draft list of Conference documents is attached as Annex IV.

WORKING LANGUAGES OF THE CONFERENCE

In conformity with UNESCO regulations, the Conference will have six working languages for the plenary sessions, and the introductory and concluding debates: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

The work of the workshops will be conducted in English and French, UNESCO’s working languages. Simultaneous interpretation in other languages will be possible to the extent that external financing is available.

ANNEX I

PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE 48th SESSION OF THE ICE

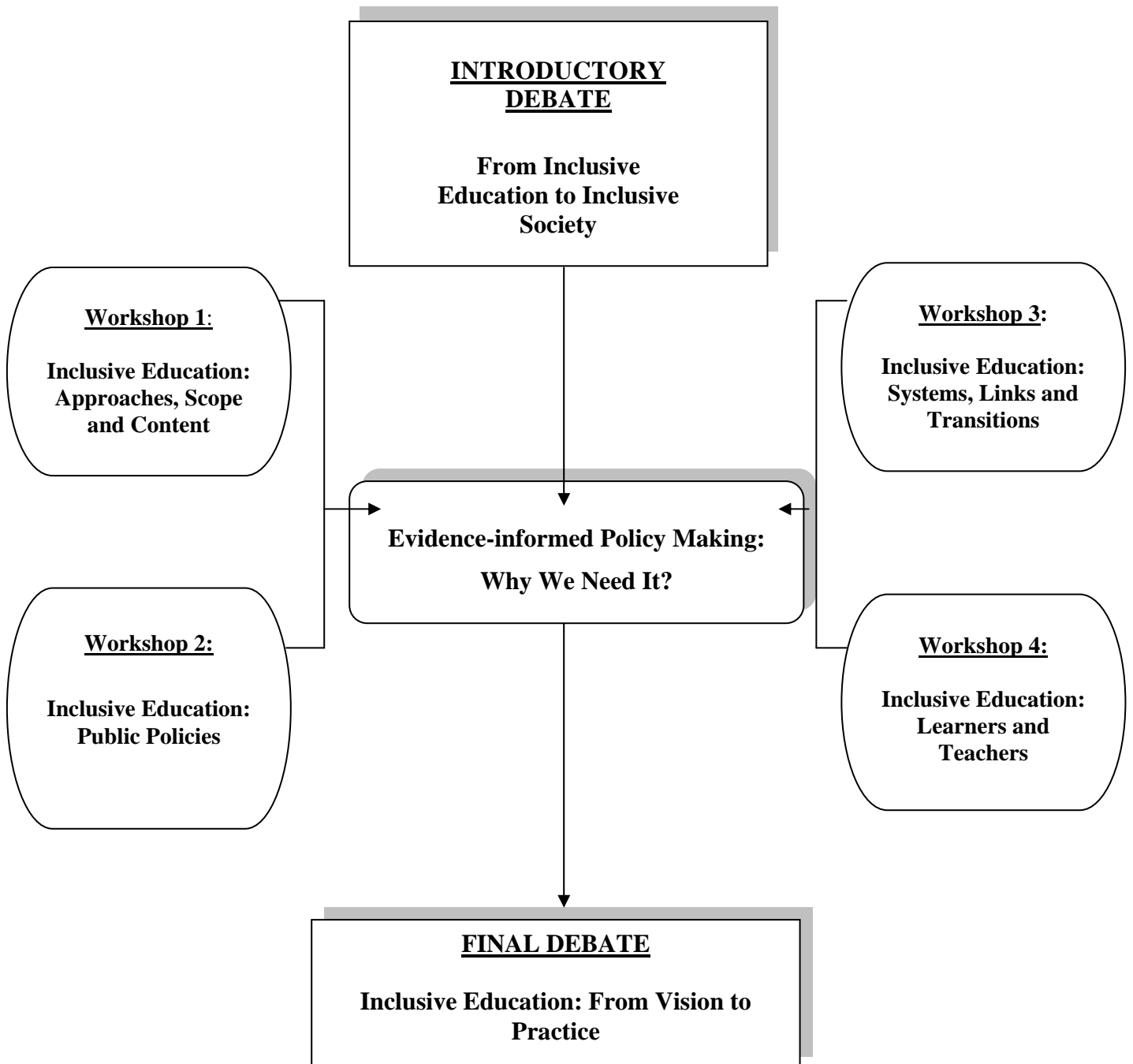
1. Opening of the Conference
2. Adoption of the Agenda (ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/1)
3. Election of the Chairman
4. Election of the Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteur of the Conference and constitution of the Drafting Group of the “Conclusions and Recommendations”
5. Proposed Organization of the Work of the Conference (ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/2)
6. Review of the Conference’s theme: “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future” (ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3)
7. Presentation of the Outcomes of the Work of the Conference by the Rapporteur
8. Adoption of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48th session of the ICE
9. Closing of the Conference

ANNEX II

48th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

25 – 28 NOVEMBER 2008

“INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE”



ANNEX III

Proposed structure of the 48th session of the International Conference on Education “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future”		
Session	25-28 November 2008	Time schedule
Opening Ceremony	Tuesday 25	9:30 – 11:00
<u>Introductory debate:</u> “From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Society”	Tuesday 25	11:00 – 13:00
Workshop 1: “Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content” (parallel sessions A + B + C + D)	Tuesday 25	15:00 – 18:00
Workshop 2: “Inclusive Education: Public Policies” (parallel sessions A + B + C + D)	Wednesday 26	9:30 – 12:30
J.A. Comenius Medal Award Ceremony	Wednesday 26	14:15 – 15:30
Synthesis and discussion of the outcomes of Workshops 1 and 2	Wednesday 26	15:45 – 18:00
Workshops 3: “Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions” (parallel sessions A + B) and Workshop 4: “Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers” (parallel sessions A + B)	Thursday 27	10:00 – 13:00
One hour devoted to the discussion of the outcomes of Workshops 3 and 4	Thursday 27	15:00 – 16:00
<u>Final Debate:</u> “Inclusive Education: From Vision to Practice”		16:00 – 18:00
Closure of the 48 th Session: Presentation of the results of the Conference by the Rapporteur and approval of the final documents.	Friday 28	10:00 – 13:00

ANNEX IV

DRAFT LIST OF DOCUMENTS FOR THE 48th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

Working documents

ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/1	Provisional Agenda
ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/2	Proposed Organization of the Work of the Conference
ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/3	Reference Document on: “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future” and document to support the discussions.
ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/4	General Presentation of the 48th session of the ICE
ED/BIE/CONFINTED 48/5	Conclusions and Recommendations of the 48th session of the ICE

Information documents

A series of information documents, a delegates’ guide, a provisional list of participants, a list of national reports presented at the Conference, a questionnaire on the outcomes of the Conference, etc., will be prepared immediately before or during the Conference and distributed to participants.

