

CARIBBEAN SYMPOSIUM ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Preparatory Activity of the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education
(ICE, November 2008, Geneva)

Kingston, Jamaica
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Organized by

Ministry of Education, Jamaica
UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE)
UNESCO Kingston Cluster Office for the Caribbean
Division for the Promotion of Basic Education (Ed/BAS)

1. On the Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an increasingly growing concern that informs the processes of educational reform in both developing and developed regions. Traditionally, the concept of inclusive education has been circumscribed to the group of students with special needs and predominantly those with physical and/or mentally disabilities and refugees. The approaches and responses have been essentially remedial and corrective, mainly by setting up differentiated structures, tracks and special schools, which feed in many cases institutional and pedagogical segregation and isolation.

Mainly from the nineties onwards, the scope, the objectives, the content and the implications of inclusive education have profoundly changed. The principle of inclusive education was adopted in the World Conference on Special Needs Education: access and quality (Salamanca, 1994)¹: “all schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, cultural or social conditions, including disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities or children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas”.

In different regions, progress has been achieved in terms of the instrumentation of integration models to incorporate special needs students into regular schools, as complex and controversial processes without immediate results, where cultural, social and educational factors intermingle. Merely focusing solely on the inclusion of these groups of students to regular schools, by facilitating the access while maintaining educational and curricular models that are homogenous and not very differentiated (approach that tended to predominate in the eighties), makes it difficult to effectively respond to their diverse expectations and needs and can be translated into an unwanted way of increasing these students’ dropout rate.

The concept of inclusion has evolved towards the notion that all children should have equal learning opportunities regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or differences in abilities and capacities. The focus is on the achievement of effective integration where the educational system can provide an institutional, curricular and pedagogical response to learners’ diverse situations and conditions.

It mainly implies fostering friendly environments and providing each child and teenager with real learning opportunities in the same or similar type of school by recognizing, respecting and assuming the responsibility of effectively respond to diversity. Effective integration of children

¹ See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000984/098427eo.pdf>

in schools is about providing inclusive settings as Rona Tutt clearly points out², for each of them in different types of schools, made by a continuum of different and complementary offers (articulation and coordination of education and other social services) that try to respond to learners' diversities. Integration and inclusion are complementary terms that are embedded within the idea that all schools have the moral responsibility and institutional challenge of providing inclusive settings for all children to establish the foundations for an effective integration.

In fact, the different forms and ways of exclusion seem to question the capacity of the education systems to provide effective learning opportunities. On the one hand, we see how repetition, over-age, dropout, low learning outcomes and difficulty in developing minimum levels of citizenship education competencies intermingle so as to generate exclusion based many times on pervasive and regressive institutional and pedagogical practices. Empirical evidence clearly indicates that a student who repeats the first years of school has a strong probability of dropping out in secondary education. On the other hand, exclusion, as was stated during the 2004 International Conference of Education³, implies the absence of professional and social competencies as well as the impossibility of acceding to essential knowledge so as to exert autonomous and responsible citizenship.

How to break the circle of exclusion that has one of its key underlying foundations in the repetition and dropout rates that occur in the first years of primary school? How to address the relationship between increasing universal access to secondary education and the subsisting elitist model that principally penalizes the deprived sector? How much do we respect, tolerate and empower school and diversity in children as a way of attaining more inclusion? Which are the forms and contents, the explicit and implicit ones that feed social and pedagogical exclusion? What is the relationship between a prescriptive vision of curriculum, only constructed top-down, and the processes of exclusion? Do low expectations of principals and teachers impact upon the learning outcomes of students?

UNESCO⁴ defines inclusion “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”.

Forging conditions and opportunities for all is the laying foundation of a democratic concept of quality education, which is clearly embedded in the UNESCO statement that “Education for All can't be achieved without improving quality”⁵. Inclusive Education could be a principle and a strategy in addressing the challenges of Education for All (EFA)⁶ goals within a holistic framework. Some of them indicate the need for:

² Tutt, R. 2007. *Every Child included*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing (PCP) and The Association for all School Leaders.

³ UNESCO. 2004. *Internacional Conference of Education. 47th meeting. Workshops 2A y 2B Quality education and social inclusion*. Geneva: IBE/UNESCO. Annex XVI, pp. 8–14.

⁴ UNESCO. 2005. *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁵ UNESCO. 2004. *EFA Global Monitoring Report. The Quality Imperative*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁶ The six EFA goals refer to the expansion of early childhood care and education, to the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all, to the promotion of learning and life skills for young people and adults, to the increase of adult literacy by 50 per cent, to the achievement of gender parity by 2005

- (i) assuming in a more decisive way a human-rights based approach which implies exercising and enjoying the right to education;
- (ii) better visualizing education as a public good based on an irreplaceable governmental mission and responsibility, as well as its commitment to providing appropriate funds, conditions and opportunities; and
- (iii) developing a clear and comprehensive agenda of educational change and policy reform tied to promote and facilitate the right to access and to obtain a high quality equitable education and not driven by the agendas, the demands and the corporate interests of the suppliers.

The educational response to diversity and equity in education is probably the most important challenge currently faced by teachers and the educational systems. The attainment of these goals requires profound changes in the educational practices, conceptions and attitudes so as to make it possible that all students, without exception, have the same learning opportunities, develop their capacities to the full and participate in educational situations on equal terms. This effort can only be possible through the joint work of different actors of the educational environment and through the articulation with social and economic policies, confirming the principle that we are all responsible for education.

Inclusive education means guaranteeing the right to education, participation and equal opportunities for all children, teenagers and adults, considering especially those living under disadvantaged situations or suffering from any form of discrimination.

From a societal vision, inclusive education is clearly and substantially linked to the discussion around the type of society and well-being as well as the quality of democracy we wish and pursue (a clear feedback relationship between education and society). It is based on the consideration of education as a central social policy which lays the foundations for an equitable development of the society under a long-term perspective.

Under an wider social perspective, the discussion on inclusive education considers central issues such as: i) the struggle against poverty, marginality, segregation, exclusion and HIV-AIDS, ii) the consideration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism as both a right and a learning context, and iii) the rights of minorities, migrants and autochthonous populations.

From a strictly educational vision that complements the social one, inclusion implies, among other relevant aspects, the careful and detailed consideration of the specificity and uniqueness of each child and teenager so as to provide them a real educational opportunity throughout their lives. It is about the ways in which teachers and students interact and generate mutual empathy and nearness, understand and respect their diversities and jointly create suitable conditions for achieving relevant and pertinent learning opportunities for all. Within this framework, cognitive education plays a key role in achieving an inclusive education as it tends to make children aware of their own cognitive functions, which can help them to understand more and learn more effectively.

The achievement of conditions and opportunities of inclusive education⁷ in the educational systems demands collective thinking and action around the concept of social justice, on beliefs surrounding the learning potentials of each student, on conceptual frameworks that sustain good

and gender equality by 2015, and to the improvement of the quality of education. See portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php.

⁷ British Educational Research Journal. 2005. *Thematic Review. Inclusive education: discourse and action*. Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2005, pp. 269-275

practices of teaching and learning and on the promotion of a comprehensive vision of curriculum that implies processes and results in a double dimension comprising both political and technical aspects.

In overall terms, Inclusive Education implies four key elements:

- a) it is essentially a process of looking for the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity as well as trying to learn how to learn from the differences;
- b) it is linked to stimulating, through multiple strategies, the creativity and the capacity of addressing and resolving problems by students;
- c) it comprises the right of the child to attend school, express his/her opinion, have quality learning experiences and attain significant learning outcomes, and
- d) it implies a moral responsibility of prioritizing those students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes.

2. Theme of the 48th ICE

The International Conference of Education (ICE) is the major international forum to promote dialogue on educational policies among the Ministries of Education and relevant stakeholders such as researchers, professionals, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs. It is organized by the International Bureau of Education (IBE).

The International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO) Council proposed that the 48th session of the International Conference of Education (ICE) should focus on the general theme “**Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future**” and be tentatively held in Geneva in November 2008. Under the general theme of “inclusive education” and assuming the already mentioned UNESCO definition of inclusion as a reference framework, four sub-themes (see annex), have been proposed to be addressed in the workshops:

- (i) Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content (to broaden the understanding of the theory and the practice of inclusive education);
- (ii) Inclusive Education: Public Policies (to demonstrate the role of governments in the development and the implementation of policies on inclusive education);
- (iii) Inclusive Education: Systems, Links and Transitions (to create education systems which offer opportunities for life-long learning); and
- (iv) Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers (to foster a learning environment where teachers are equipped to meet the learners’ diverse expectations and needs).

The ICE 2008 is foreseen as an opportunity for promoting dialogue among Ministers of Education in order to effectively approach a subject that, having a universal nature, can be understood and strengthened as a key strategy to advance and support the attainment of the Education for All (EFA) goals according to a holistic approach.

3. Objectives of the Caribbean Symposium

In order to provide relevant inputs to the debates that will take place during the next ICE, UNESCO is carrying out diverse activities aimed at promoting an in-depth, plural, open and constructive discussion around inclusive education. Prestigious actors coming from the Ministries, Universities, International Bodies, NGOs and civil society in general will be involved in these activities.

As a first stage in the process of dialogue and collective thinking, regional workshops/symposia are jointly carried out by the IBE and the Divisions, Institutes and Offices of UNESCO as a preparatory activity of the 48th ICE in the countries where UNESCO⁸ organizes its work, as a way of sharing and promoting visions, policies, strategies and good practices. This process of work at a regional level is based on the activities carried out by the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (see Annex 2), a worldwide initiative coordinated by the IBE to help regions and countries conceive and implement curricular changes within the framework of the EFA goals.

Once the regional workshops held, a worldwide e-forum will be organized in order to share and discuss the regional inputs, as well as the grounds, strategies and contents of a critical roadmap that makes it possible to advance on the elaboration of a shared agenda on inclusive education.

The Caribbean Symposium on Inclusion in Education forms part of the overall effort to stimulate discussion, debates and action around the evolving concept of inclusive education. Such concept is now firmly rooted in the principle that all children should attend schools of equal quality regardless of their cultural and social backgrounds or their differences in abilities and capacities. The focus is on integration and on providing an equal formal access to the same type of education. Inclusion is about reaching out for those who are excluded and making education a flexible process that can engage each and every child in a relevant manner.

Participants in the symposium are to include: chief education officers/EFA coordinators from the cluster countries, NGOs and civil society representatives particularly from excluded groups (i.e. marginalized youth, people living with HIV and AIDS, indigenous people, people with disabilities), teachers' associations, school and university representatives, human rights groups, UN agencies, and other relevant stakeholders in the field of education.

The overall goal of the symposium is to provide a regional input to the International Conference on Education 2008, while generating a sub-regional debate on the diverse experience and knowledge of the conference participants. The underlying concept is to accompany the deliberations from the chief education officers representing the Caribbean countries with inputs from civil society and excluded groups who bring their experience of exclusion- and practice of inclusion- to play into the educational discourse. The final report of the conference should ideally represent both a summary of educational actions undertaken at the national level and an overview of medium-term challenges and objectives related to inclusion that take into account the views of the main interest groups and beneficiaries.

The objectives of the Caribbean Symposium are as follows:

- a) the sharing of visions, strategies and practices with regard to the progress of inclusive education at regional and national levels;

⁸ There are five UNESCO regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Gulf Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and North America.

- b) the identification of common concerns and the discussion on political proposals related to inclusive education;
- c) the shaping of a significant regional input to the debates of the 48th ICE, which generates proposals and establishes tendencies around inclusive education in the region.

4. Structure of the Caribbean Symposium

The Symposium will last two full days plus the opening ceremony with key-note speeches on the afternoon of the first day.

The programme will feature core sessions and panel discussion sessions. The core sessions will be placed within the framework of a rights-based approach to inclusion in education and will allow for the presentation of national reports, and the sharing of experiences among participants on educational action at the country and regional (CARICOM) levels. It is the more technical instance that will ensure the kind of substantial reporting that IBE is seeking from the planned regional conferences framed by the four sub-themes identified for the ICE: *Approaches, Scope and Content; Public Policies; Systems, Links and Transitions; Learners and teachers.*

The symposium, aside from the core sessions will comprise a series of panel discussion sessions which will focus on specific themes linked to inclusion. They will be chaired by organisations with a specific expertise and/or interest in the theme. Examples are:

1. Inclusion of people living with HIV and AIDS in the Caribbean school system (Caribbean Network of Seropositives, CRN+)
2. The challenges of the teaching profession in an inclusive system (Caribbean Association of Teachers and Education International)
3. Inclusion in early childhood education (UNICEF and UNESCO)
4. Gender-based exclusion in Caribbean schools (Prof Bailey, UWI Centre for Gender and Development Studies)
5. Access of persons with disabilities to quality education (Caribbean Association of Persons With Disabilities);
6. Indigenous people and education (Indigenous groups from Guyana, Suriname, Belize and Maroons from Jamaica)
7. Poverty as exclusion: can education break the cycle?
8. Violence as exclusion (Prof Maureen Samms-Vaughan)

The panel session will have one presentation made by the leader organisation, followed by a debate. Audio-visual presentations would be recommended.

Day One

The conference, after the protocol interventions, should be opened by a key-note address by the Minister of Education and Youth of Jamaica followed by a presentation by IBE/HQs on the new enlarged concept of inclusion and its impact on education systems.

There will be a welcome cultural concert to be held on the evening of December 5th in Emancipation Park in Kingston. The concert will feature performers representing Jamaican traditional and indigenous culture such as: Mento Bands performing Caribbean folk music; Kumina dance performances, a traditional Jamaican folk form involving dance, music and religious practices and beliefs; Kete drums, extensively used in Rastafarian-based music; Dub poetry, which often depends heavily on a steady beat that helps keep the poem's rhythm. The concert will be organised by the government of Jamaica (Commission for Cultural development) with UNESCO's financial support.

Day Two

The country reports will be presented in a brief format which shall be identified. It should ensure knowledge and experience sharing while not burdening the conference with a series of 13 presentations. The reports should discuss elements of the four main areas identified for the ICE: *Approaches, Scope and Content; Public Policies; Systems, Links and Transitions; Learners and Teachers.*

In the evening, a public lecture by Professor Barry Chevannes will be organised at the UWI Mona Campus on “Marginalised Youth and Education”. The organisation of the event will be delegated to UWI with UNESCO funds.

Day Three

In the morning there will be parallel panels. In the afternoon there will be a summary of the presentations and debates by the rapporteurs, followed by a discussion on priorities, challenges and inputs to the ICE based on the core and panel discussions of the previous days.

A Report of the symposium will be drafted by the IBE and it is planned to be published under the coordination of the co-organizers. It will include the contributions of ministerial representatives, speakers and consultants. Further information will be provided during the symposium.

The regional workshop will be held in English.

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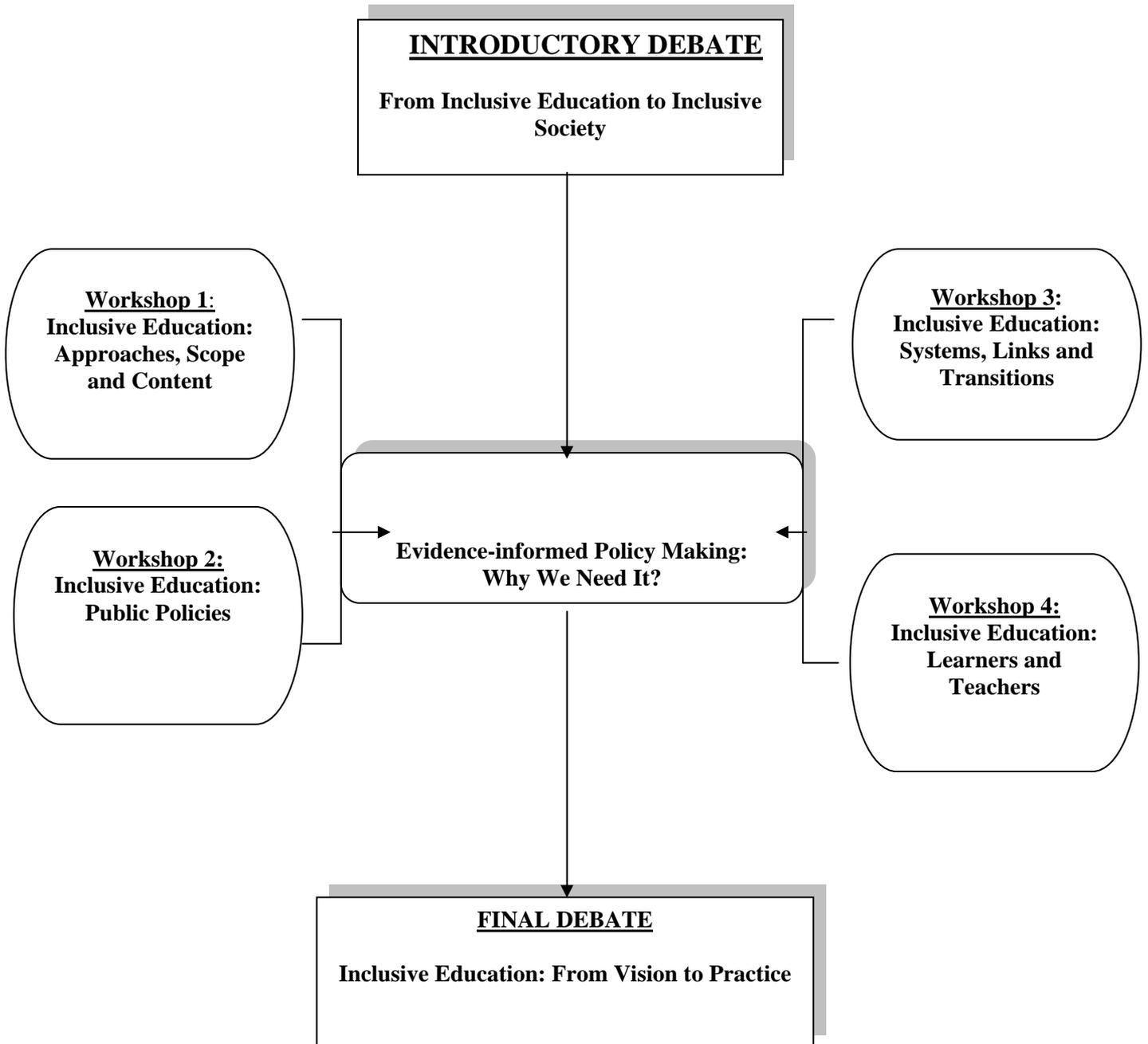
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48th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

“INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE”



Annex 2

Community of Practice in Curriculum Development

In July 2005, the IBE, in conjunction with curriculum specialists from different regions of the world set up the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP), which is conceived as a national, intra- and inter-regional space where the issues of curriculum change can be jointly discussed and implemented within the framework of a holistic approach to determining and implementing the Education for All (EFA) goals.

From that moment onwards, it has been progressively developed as a space for production and sharing at a world level, which implies a double dimension: on the one hand, it makes it possible to share visions, experiences, innovative practices, research results and documents for discussion; and on the other hand, it offers concrete possibilities of collectively developing, at the national, intra and inter-regional levels, institutional capacity building programs around curricular issues, mainly from the demands and needs identified by educators on this matter. Under this approach, horizontal cooperation, mainly South-South, is permanently encouraged by the Community of Practice.

Today, the Community of Practice is composed of 697 educators from 85 countries and various organizations and institutions –Ministries of Education, universities, NGOs, foundations, inter-governmental councils, international cooperation entities, among others. The diversity of institutions and actors is visualized as an opportunity to promote dialogue and share different perspectives, and it also makes it possible to find common viewpoints, reflecting on the role that Education must play as a long-term public policy so as to forge solid grounds for the development and social equity.

Its main activities are:

- The promotion of documentation sharing on curriculum issues around EFA on a global scale.
- The encouragement of comparative research on processes of curriculum change
- The publication and dissemination of regional and national curriculum productions.
- Strengthening collective thinking and action among public and private institutions on agendas of educational and curricular policy, and
- The development of national and regional capacity building programs around curricular approaches, tools and resources, which help regions and countries face the challenge of designing and implementing curriculum changes (for example, competency-based training programs).

As regards Latin America and the Caribbean, the Community of Practice is composed of 234 members from 18 countries. It is an active, dynamic and growing community capable of proposing and implementing ideas. The progressive coordination of its activities with OREALC and other UNESCO offices in the region makes it possible to refine its institutional position and strengthen the contents and impacts of the activities developed.