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DEFINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, KEY PRINCIPLES AND VALUES REFLECTING ON EQUITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

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What comes to your mind when you hear the word „Diversity“?

Nationality? Language? Religion? Gender? Socioeconomic status? Disability status? Ethnicity? Age? It's a multifaceted concept. Some are permanent (visible) and some are acquired and change over the course of a lifetime.

The combination of all these dimensions influence our values, beliefs, behaviours, experiences and expectations and make us all unique as individuals!

What is „Inclusion“? People commonly think of inclusion as concerned with the participation of children with impairments of those categorized as „having special educational needs“. We see this view as problematic.

Inclusion is connected strongly with Equity. People usually use this term and „Equality“ interchangeably. Equality is sameness, it is giving everyone the same MEANS, while „Equity“ is FAIRNESS, giving everyone ACCESS to the same opportunities. We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality.

What is inclusion after all? „It's a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problem, but as opportunities for enriching learning“. (Unesco 2005)

Four key elements of inclusion are:

- it is a never ending process;
- it is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students;
- it is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers and provide „resources to support learning and participation“ for all students;
- involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion or underachievement.

General comment no.4 definition on models of education:

- EXCLUSION occurs when students are prevented from education in any form.
- SEGREGATION occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed to respond to a particular impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.
- INTEGRATION is a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.
- INCLUSION involves a process of systematic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best correspond to their requirements and preferences.

Placing student with disabilities with mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion.

Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.

Inclusive education is a process towards equal learning, achievement and citizen opportunities. We need to change the system to fit all children with different abilities, background, gender, size, age.... (social emotional learning).