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## Thematic Notes No.1

*Curriculum On The Move*

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### Inclusion in education

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*The discussion around inclusion in education gains renewed momentum in light of the challenges posed by the transformation of education and the education system in the post-pandemic era. Certainly, the implications and consequences of COVID-19 reveal the multidimensionality, harshness and permanence of situations of vulnerability which educational systems are faced and the need to deepen around the concept, contents and scope of inclusion under a common overarching vision.*

Precisely, in light of rethinking inclusion in education, on June 22, 2021, UNESCO headquarters, the University of Manchester and the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO), organized the webinar *"Ensuring education and Inclusive Learning for Educational Recovery: Practical Ways Forward"* with the aim of focusing on "what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning in an inclusive way and on the contributions of teachers as schools reopen" (UNESCO, 2021). The debate centers around how educators can be empowered, trained, appreciated, and supported to include every learner effectively and genuinely.

The webinar brought together leaders and practitioners of inclusion from different regions, and, in particular, presented the experiences carried out by committed educators from countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Chile, Morocco, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Zambia. Certainly, the worldwide exchange between educators stimulates searching for common answers to universal problems through an understanding of education as a permanent and evolving collective construction that combines global and open views with locally relevant and sustainable responses.

The common denominator to all the presentations was the strong adherence to the principle *"all students matter, and*

*matter equally"* which is the flagship of the policy document produced by UNESCO "Guide to ensure inclusion and equity in education" (2017). Inclusion essentially implies the removal of existing barriers from within and outside educational systems, enabling every learner to be given a real opportunity to be educated and learn.

Educators from the six countries mentioned, inventoried the essential issues that we must care about in order to move towards higher levels of inclusion. On the one hand, mention was made of students, educators, communities, families and schools. On the other hand, collaboration, creativity, contextualization and networks/communities of practice were highlighted. Certainly, it remains a central challenge how these concerns are connected under a systemic vision that is meaningful and relevant.

Precisely, the pandemic makes even more visible the limitations of fragmented approaches that prioritize an actor, an institution, a topic or an approach as a "capricious" attempt to delimit a field of intervention or action isolated from the effect of other factors. It is difficult to achieve a genuine inclusion of each student if, at the same time, no attention is paid, for example, to knowing in depth how educators understand, act and take responsibility in the face of challenges around inclusion. Or else, families react to the possibility that their children learn in classrooms with a heterogeneous composition of students in terms of profiles, capacities and contexts.

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The presentations made by inclusion specialists allow us to identify six main ideas that can contribute to repositioning inclusive education as the spirit and subject matter of education and educational systems. The reference to inclusion implies understanding it in the double dimension of inclusion in education and its synergies with cultural and social inclusion, and of inclusive education as a transversal cross-cutting strategy - curricular, pedagogical and teaching - of the educational system as a whole. Let us look at each of these key ideas.

1

#### The first of the main ideas

reaffirms that inclusion implies the personalization of education in order to precisely attend the multiple faces of diversity, which is at the same time individual, cultural, social and identity-related, among other fundamental dimensions. The personalization of education does not imply the isolation of the student from collective learning spaces, but rather the recognition of its specific learning expectations and needs, which can be addressed in the face-to-face and virtual spaces of the classroom through a repertoire of synchronous and asynchronous individual and group activities. Likewise, personalization is framed in universal objectives for all students, which are precisely the guarantor of an education based on equality of meaning and which strengthens its understanding as a common good.

2

#### The second main idea

is in favor of an inclusive, empathic and participatory curriculum which, ultimately, is the way to give meaning, content and sustainability to the education of new generations in light of imaginaries that reflect the ideals and aspirations of society as a whole. The experts stressed that the curriculum must, on the one hand, connect with and promote the plural and open participation of a diversity of actors and institutions strengthening its legitimacy, and, on the other, be friendly,

close and inclusive of the concerns of educators and students. An inclusive curriculum empowers teachers to assume their share of responsibility for its design, development and implementation, while, at the same time, it confers protagonism and responsibility to students in crafting and developing their personalized learning pathways.

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Inclusion implies the personalization of education in order to precisely attend the multiple faces of diversity...

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#### The third of the main ideas

is related to the appropriation of technology as a community resource that allows, on one hand, to connect sensitivities, ideas, themes, learning areas and disciplines, and on the other, to strengthen ties between students, educators, families and communities within the aspiration of democratizing and facilitating learning opportunities and processes. The community approach to technology is a strong trigger to rethink educational modes and strategies outside schools, and also to consider the diversity of technological resources that make sense and are accepted in each context. Inclusion cannot only imply free access to technological resources, as it also essentially demands steering technologies towards promoting the competencies of students and educators for a proactive, inventive and disruptive use of these resources, taking into account the specificities of each context.

4

#### The fourth key idea

emphasizes the relevance of knowledge, learning, collaboration, trust and listening among peers - educators and students - to craft and sustain inclusive teaching, learning and assessment processes and practices. Peers can empower each other under the understanding that we all need to be

supported, and at the same time, supportive of each other. School networks, communities of practice and collaborative work among learners to respond to global and local challenges are some examples to highlight.

5

**The fifth of the main ideas**, associated with the previous one, implies the horizontal mobilization of knowledge and ideas embedded in each person, but not known or worked collectively. A good part of the answers to the challenges of inclusion lies in making visible and promoting the dissemination of proposals that are not socialized and that remain within the confines of the classroom and of a particular educator. They are sometimes said to be in the 'minds and practices' of educators, but they are not documented or shared. The challenge appears to lie in how education systems encourage knowledge to navigate and flow between schools, educators, and students, as well as between levels, provisions and learning environments.

For example, the Partnership for Learning framed in the educational recovery strategy of the Greater Manchester district (England, 2020), implements a collaborative strategy among schools based on three components: (i) trios of schools understood as apprentices in the action, serving similar populations and located in different areas; (ii) each trio shares experiences and ideas online on how to improve the presence, participation, and progress of all students; and (iii) summaries of promising practices emerging from the trios are shared with other schools through face-to-face and online encounters.

6

**The sixth key idea** refers to the transformation of intramural educational centers into lifelong learning spaces to facilitate learning opportunities from zero to forever (UNESCO-IBE, 2021). Inclusion is envisioned as a community societal dimension that enables people to be educated in a diversity

of spaces at all times, removing barriers and bias regarding their learning potential.

As such, inclusion would no longer be merely visualized by levels or provisions or by accessibility, but in terms of the objectives, processes and learning achievements that mark the personalized path of each student understood and valued as a person. Inclusion would cease to have a hegemonic categorical approach, under the broad and often discriminatory umbrella of special educational needs, to become a personalized, humanizing and respectful response to each person as a special, unique and indivisible human being.

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Inclusion is envisioned as a community societal dimension that enables people to be educated in a diversity of spaces at all times, removing barriers and bias regarding their learning potential

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The six main ideas outlined - inclusion as personalization, an inclusive empathic and participatory curriculum, technology as a community resource, peer learning, horizontal mobilization of knowledge and ideas and the visualization of schools as lifelong learning spaces - emerge from educators reflecting on their practices and providing evidence on how to advance the inclusive education agenda. The question arises as to how educational systems open up to stimulate, document, share and scale up the initiatives generated from a restless, proactive and purposeful bottom.



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