Principles of Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

In every classroom there are some children who have some learning problems. They need a little extra help from teachers to learn. Inclusive education refers to instruction that is specially designed to meet the needs of the exceptional children. It involves designing the physical environment in the classroom (use of ramps) teaching procedures, teaching content and equipment for a particular type of disability. In this case its implementation is not an easy task; it needs thorough investigation, understanding its aims and principles and taking consistent and appropriate measures to make it successful.

Schools are currently undergoing a process of reconstructed educational practice and thinking. The key principles presented in this section centre upon aspects of educational systems, to be crucial in promoting quality in inclusive education and supporting the learners with different types of special educational needs (SEN). These aspects range from national legislation to school level, each of which must be considered within policy frameworks for promoting quality in the inclusive education. Seven inter-connected areas of key principles are presented in detail along with specific recommendations that appear to be necessary for their effective implementation. The ultimate goal of these key principles is to promote participation in inclusive education by ensuring quality educational provision. With this in mind, the key principles are widening participation, Education and training; Organizational culture, Support Structures, Flexible resourcing system, Policies and Legislation can be seen to work towards this goal.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, Disability, Special educational needs (SEN), Organizational culture and Legislation.*

Principle-I: Widening participation to increase educational opportunity for all learners
The goal for inclusive education is to widen access to education and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners vulnerable to exclusion to realize their potential. When considering the promotion of quality in inclusive education, it is necessary to underline a number of key factors in relation to this goal: Inclusion concerns a wider range of learners than those

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identified as having special educational needs. It is concerned with any learners who are at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities, resulting in school failure;

- Access to mainstream education alone is not enough. Participation means that all learners are engaged in learning activities that are meaningful for them. The promotion of positive attitudes in education is crucial for widening participation. Parental and teacher attitudes towards the education of learners with a wide range of needs appear to be largely determined by personal experiences; this fact needs to be recognized and strategies and resources introduced/implemented to address attitudinal factors. Effective strategies to promote positive attitudes include:

- Ensuring all teachers are trained and feel able to assume responsibility for all learners, whatever their individual needs;

- Supporting the participation of learners and their parents in educational decision-making. This includes involving learners in decisions about their own learning and supporting parents to make informed choices for their (younger) children. At the level of an individual learner's educational career, the following aspects appear to make a significant contribution to achieving the goal of widening participation:

- A view of learning as process – not content based – and a main goal for all learners being the development of learning to learn skills, not just subject knowledge;

- Developing personalized learning approaches for all learners, where the learner sets, records and reviews their own learning goals in collaboration with their teachers and families and is helped to develop a structured way of learning independently in order to take control of their own learning;

- The development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or similar individualized teaching programme, for some learners (possibly with more complex learning needs) who may require a more focused approach for their learning. IEPs should be developed to maximize learners' independence and involvement in goal setting and also collaboration with parents and families.

- An approach to learning that aims to meet the diverse needs of all learners without labeling / categorizing is consistent with inclusive principles and requires the implementation of educational strategies and approaches that will be beneficial to all learners:

- Co-operative teaching where teachers take a team approach involving learners themselves, parents, peers, other school teachers and support staff, as well as multi-disciplinary team members as appropriate;

- Co-operative learning where learners help each other in different ways – including peer tutoring – within flexible and well-thought out learner groupings;

- Collaborative problem solving involving systematic approaches to positive classroom management;

- Heterogeneous grouping of learners and a differentiated approach to dealing with a diversity of learners' needs in the classroom. Such an approach involves structured goal

setting, reviewing and recording, alternative routes for learning, flexible instruction and different ways of grouping for all learners;

- Effective teaching approaches based on targeted goals, alternative routes for learning, flexible instruction and the use of clear feedback to learners;
- Teacher assessment that supports learning and does not label or lead to negative consequences for learners. Assessment should take a holistic/ecological view that considers academic, behavioral, social and emotional aspects of learning and clearly informs next steps in the learning process.
- Strategies for widening participation within mainstream classrooms cannot be implemented in isolation from the context of the wider school and home situation. In order to increase educational opportunities for all learners, a number of inter-connected factors must be in place to support the work of individual teachers. These are outlined in the following sections.

Principle-II: Education and training in inclusive education for all teachers

For teachers to work effectively in inclusive settings, they need to have the appropriate values and attitudes, skills and competences, knowledge and understanding. This means all teachers should be prepared to work in inclusive education in their initial training and then have access to further, in-service training later in their careers in order to develop the knowledge and skills to enhance their inclusive practice in inclusive settings. Training for inclusion involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills in:

- Differentiation and meeting diverse needs that allows a teacher to support individual learning in classrooms;
- Working collaboratively with parents and families;
- Collaboration and teamwork that facilitates teachers working effectively in teams with other teachers as well as a range of educational and other service professionals working within and outside of the school. Alongside training for all teachers for inclusion, teacher-training systems should provide opportunities for:
- The training of specialized teachers in order to maintain and develop specialist resources for supporting all teachers in inclusive settings;
- Shared training opportunities for professionals from different services and sectors in order to facilitate effective collaborative working;
- Training for school/educational organization leaders in developing their leadership skills and vision in line with the promotion of inclusive values and practice;
- Training routes and possibilities for teacher trainers in inclusive education in order for them to deliver the initial and in-service teacher education programmes that promote quality in inclusive education.

Principle-III: Organizational culture and ethos that promotes inclusion

At the level of the school, or other educational organization, a shared culture and ethos based upon positive attitudes towards welcoming a diversity of learners in classrooms and meeting diverse needs in education is crucial. Such a shared culture:

- Includes all stakeholders: learners, their families, teachers and educational staff and the local community;
- Is guided by school/educational organization leaders with a vision for inclusion that includes clear thinking regarding school development, accountability and responsibility for meeting a diverse range of needs. Organizational cultures that are supportive of inclusion result in:
- Practice that avoids segregation in all forms and promotes a school for all, providing equality of educational opportunity for all learners;
- A culture of teamwork and openness to partnership with parents as well as inter-disciplinary approaches;
- Educational practice to meet a diverse range of needs being seen as an approach to developing quality education for all pupils generally, rather than as being focused upon specific groups.

Principle-IV: Support structures organized so as to promote inclusion

Support structures that impact upon inclusive education are diverse and often involve a range of different service professionals, approaches and working methods. Established support structures can act as a support to, or as a barrier to inclusion. Support structures that promote inclusive education are:

- Composed of a range of different specialist services, organizations and resource centre's, and professionals that reflect local level needs. Support structures should be able to respond flexibly to a range of organizational, as well as individual professional and family level needs;
- Co-ordinate both within and between different sectors (education, health, social services etc.) and teams of support personnel;
- Co-ordinate so as to support in the best way possible successful transitions of all learners between different phases of their lifelong
- Learning (pre-school, compulsory, post-compulsory and employment related education).
- Such support structures employ an inter-disciplinary approach that:
- Integrates the knowledge and perspectives of different areas of professional expertise in order to consider learners' needs holistically;
- Uses a participatory approach that requires a change in the locus of control for support and input from support specialists. Decision making regarding support not only involves, but also becomes increasingly led by mainstream class teachers, learners and their families, working in partnership with inter-disciplinary professionals.

- This requires a major attitudinal shift on the part of specialist professionals, as well as changes to their practice.

Principle-V: Flexible resourcing systems that promote inclusion

Funding policies and structures remain one of the most significant factors determining inclusion. Limited or no access to certain facilities and provision may actually hinder inclusion and equality of opportunity for learners with SEN. Mechanisms for the funding and resourcing of education that promote – rather than hinder – inclusion are guided by financing policies that:

- Are geared towards providing flexible, effective and efficient responses to learners' needs;
- Promote inter-sectoral collaboration from relevant services;
- Ensure co-ordination between regional and national level funding structures. Flexible resourcing systems can be seen to facilitate:
- Decentralized approaches to the allocation of resources that enable local organizations to support effective inclusive practice. Decentralized funding models are likely to be more cost-effective and more responsive to the needs of local populations;
- Opportunities for financing preventative approaches in education, as well as effective support for learners identified as having specific needs;
- Possibilities for resourcing inclusion work in schools or other educational organizations based on a range of factors and not solely based upon diagnosis of individual learners' needs. Such approaches provide flexibility in using financial resources according to identified organizational needs and requirements within the context of local or national policies.

Principle-VI: Policies that promote inclusion

The promotion of quality in inclusive education requires a clearly stated policy. The goal of the school for all should be promoted in educational policies as well as supported via school ethos and leadership, as well as teachers' practice. Policies that aim to promote quality in inclusive education:

- Take account of international level policies and initiatives;
- Are flexible enough to reflect local level needs;
- Maximize the factors supporting inclusion – as outlined above – for the individual learner and their parents at the teacher and educational organization levels. To implement inclusive education, the goals of the policy should be effectively communicated to all members of the educational community. Educational leaders at all levels – national, regional, community, as well as organizational – have an essential role in translating and implementing policy that promotes quality in inclusive education. Policies that promote quality in inclusive education need to address attitudes towards learners with diverse needs, as well as propose action to meet their needs. Such policies: - Outline teacher,

school/educational organization and support structure/service level responsibilities, as well as,

- Outline the support and training that will be provided for all stakeholders in order for these responsibilities to be fulfilled. Policies for promoting inclusion and meeting individual learners' needs within all educational sectors are 'integrated' across sectors and services. Such policies should be multi-phase and trans-sectoral and actively encourage inter-sectoral co-operation ensuring that:

- At national and local levels, policy makers from the educational, health and social sectors need to work co-operatively to devise policies and plans that will facilitate and actively support a interdisciplinary approach in all phases of lifelong learning;

- Flexible frameworks of provision that support inclusive practice are applied to all sectors of educational provision. The inclusion of learners with diverse needs within the secondary sector, transition from school to employment phase, post compulsory, higher and adult education needs to be given the same degree of focus as within the pre-primary and primary sectors;

- Policies aim to facilitate sharing of good practice and support research and development for new educational approaches, methods and tools. Whilst in the short term there should be a recognizable separate action plan or strategy for inclusive education within general policies, in the long term, inclusion in education should be 'a given' within all educational policies and strategies. Arrangements for monitoring the implementation of policies should be agreed upon at the policy planning stage. This involves:

- Identifying suitable indicators to be used as a tool for monitoring developments in policy and practice;

- Promoting partnerships between schools, local policy makers and parents to ensure greater accountability for the services provided;

- Establishing procedures for the evaluation of the quality of provision for all learners in the educational system and in particular,

- Evaluating the effect of policies in relation to their impact upon equality of opportunity for all learners.

Principle-VII: Legislation that promotes inclusion

All legislation that potentially impacts upon inclusive education within a country should clearly state inclusion as a goal. Consequently, legislation across all public sectors should lead to the provision of services that enhance developments and processes working towards inclusion in education. In particular, there should be:

- 'Integrated' legislation across sectors leading to consistency between inclusive education and other policy initiatives;

- One legal framework covering inclusive education in all educational sectors and levels. Comprehensive and co-ordinate legislation for inclusive education that fully addresses issues of flexibility, diversity and equity in all educational institutions for all learners. It

ensures that policy, provision and support are consistent across geographical areas of a country/region. Such legislation is based upon:

- A 'rights approach' where individual learners (along with their families or careers as is appropriate) can access mainstream education and necessary support services within all levels;
- The alignment of national legislation with international agreements and statements concerning inclusion.

CONCLUSION

In considering the main messages evident across the Agency's work, it can be seen that the continuing commitment of countries to promoting inclusion will be indicated by a decrease in the number of learners in fully separate (segregated) provision across the world. It is argued that the necessary systemic changes in policy and provision aimed at promoting quality in inclusive education can be guided by the inter-related and mutually supporting key principles outlined in the sections above.

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