

INCLUSION

"our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation"

- MAHATMA GHANDI

Within any human group, differences can be found, and with the rising migration of people, human diversity is abundant. Forms of human diversity include: gender, age, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, cognitive and physical abilities, race and personal interests. Diversity is a gift, and inclusive educators value diversity in the classroom as a powerful learning tool (Opertti, 2009). Mahatma Gandhi said that our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation.



Inclusive education recognises that every child deserves equitable opportunities and is founded upon the basic rights of children to be protected from discrimination and have access to education (UNICEF, 2019). As a holistic approach, inclusion serves to provide barrier-free, strength-based access to all learners (ISU Inclusion Policy, 2019). Inclusion places well-being and agency at the core of educational decision making and practice (Terzi, 2014) forcing an evaluation of beliefs and values, a shift in mindset, and a cycle of reflect-plan-act to bring about responsive and effective change. Inclusive education considers the voice, expertise, and perspective of people of difference in curriculum design (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019) and embraces unique identities to promote the development of community and belonging, international-mindedness, agentic learning, responsible local and global citizenship (ISU Inclusion Policy, 2019). As well, diversity presents rich prospects for learners to be teachers, benefitting from exposure to one another's perspectives, interests and strengths and giving chance to the social-construction of knowledge, understanding and skills.

Diverse students require diverse teaching approaches; there is no one-size-fits-all approach (Opertti, 2009; Courey et al., 2013). Multiple pathways create distinct, equally rigorous paths for students to pursue their interests and gain the real-world skills and experiences they need to be successful after school (Patrick et al., 2016). When students are empowered to make choices they become purposeful and motivated, gaining confidence and skills required for lifelong learning (IBO, 2018). Research has found that all students perform better academically in inclusive environments due to raised internal motivation, access to strategies and resources that match their learner profiles, and increased opportunities for support and review of learning (Scruggs et al., 2007; Lee, 2018). Inclusion is made possible through a focus on relationships and collaboration. In inclusive environments teachers are intentional about building community, embracing every student for who they are and listening for understanding. Students who feel that they belong and are valued do better in school (McFarland-McDaniels, n.d.). Inclusive classrooms are designed around the learner and seeks the learners voice to design space, experiences and resources that are appropriate and fully accessible (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Overall, an inclusive classroom is a dynamic environment, with fluid movement between student groupings and a mix of individual and group work (IBO, 2018), which increases the variety in social interactions and exposure to different perspectives (Augsburg, 2014). Studies have proven the benefits of student exposure to human difference in the classroom noting improved behaviours, increased acceptance and understanding of difference, a reduction in discriminatory attitudes (Austin, 2001; Enet, 2004) and increased cooperation among students (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Collaboration and partnerships between teachers, students and parents in learning enables a continuous discussion around learning and the whole child. Different perspectives, strengths and interests are valued in analysing learning and creating a varied and culturally sensitive curriculum. Change towards responsive and inclusive education is challenging and requires the support of the whole community to keep the vision alive, help recognize and celebrate successes and unearth misconceptions and assumptions, ultimately to improve learning for all.

Partnership

You may find it helpful to consider the following reflective questions:

1. Recognise the diversity within your own family. How can this be viewed as a gift and opportunity?
2. In which ways could you support your child's personal learning journey?
3. In which ways could you support the schools journey towards inclusion?

CITATIONS:

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