

## **Disability, Identity and the Struggle for Inclusion**

The question of inclusive education is a topic of increasing concern on the part of many governments, in terms of both policy and practice. It is a serious, complex and contentious issue, that is ultimately concerned with questions of equity, social justice and human rights. The issue of inclusion highlights the centrality of the development and maintenance of conditions and relations within society, that are non-oppressive and non-discriminatory. Thus, the well-being of **all** citizens is of central significance in the quest to discover new and empowering ways of engaging with difference and social bonding.

Drawing on insights and ideas from the British context, the paper will focus on the position and experience of disabled people and their struggles for greater involvement in decisions over any aspect relating to the quality of their lives.

The paper is concerned with the politics of recognition and the ways in which disabled people seek to develop and celebrate alternative and empowering definitions and understandings of disability. This perspective is expressed in what has become known as The Social Model of Disability, and it is the creation of disabled people from within very real struggles for change. Disability is viewed as a form of social oppression in which deficit, individualised, medicalised, conceptions are the subject of serious critique. The varied barriers to participation, of exclusion and discrimination, are thus the subject of critical identification, understanding and change.

An important emphasis throughout the paper is that the pursuit of inclusion is a serious, challenging and perennial task, in which there are no slick, quick, easy answers to what are fundamental issues. Whilst the position of disabled people is given a particular focus of consideration, the ultimate meaning of inclusion in terms of the well-being of **all** people is strongly advocated.

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