"Integration or Inclusion? Policy, diversity and education and the 'equality' agenda in England"

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically reflects on terminology and interpretation in relation to the concepts of integration and inclusion through the lens of recent policy developments in England.

There is little agreement on how inclusion should be interpreted either between different countries, or within countries themselves, often reflecting different understandings concerning questions of human rights and social justice. We all bring our own cultures, values and experience to the debate. Terminology such as 'inclusive education' and 'diversity' are not culturally neutral (Booth, and Ainscow, 1998), and this adds to the richness and variety of cross-cultural exchanges as well as sometimes leading to confusion and misunderstanding. Thus, the concept and practices of *integrazione scolastica* are uniquely and untranslatably part of the Italian social and cultural context and historical development. Notions such as 'inclusion' and 'human rights' are contingent, geographically, culturally and temporally situated concepts, rather than representing universal, shared values. It is important, therefore, to clarify the ways we are using terminology, and recognise that inclusive education has diverse interpretations depending on the historical, social and cultural context, and who is using the term and for what purpose.

This paper argues that policies and practices which claim to be "inclusive" must reflects the principle that inclusion concerns everybody - all learners, and all members of the school, college and wider community. There is not one kind of inclusive education for disabled children, and another kind of inclusive education for the rest of the school population. Inclusion is

> ...fundamentally about issues of human rights, equity, social justice and the struggle for a non-discriminatory society. These principles are at the heart of inclusive policy and practice.
>
> (Armstrong and Barton, 2007)

It is based on the belief in the rights of all to equal recognition, respect and treatment, regardless of difference. This does not mean that particular interests, learning styles, knowledge, and cultural and linguistic heritage should not be recognised. On the contrary – inclusion recognises, and is responsive to, diversity and the right 'to be oneself' – in an open and democratic community. This interpretation of inclusive education implies the right for all to be an equal member of their neighbourhood school and college communities. This is very different from the concept of 'integration' which focuses on the question of how an individual child, or group of children, might 'fit in' to a school or a class, rather than focusing on the need

for a fundamental transformation in the social, cultural, curricular and pedagogic life of the school, as well as its physical organisation. In the UK the term 'integration' has, traditionally, referred to a concept and practices associated with learners identified as 'having special educational needs'. *Integration* focuses on the perceived deficits in the child as creating barriers to participation, and thus derives from a 'medical model' perspective, whereas *inclusion* is underpinned by the social model and *situates the barriers to participation within the school or college and wider society.*

The paper examines these ideas through a consideration of the wider policy context and the barriers and contradictions presented by the marketisation of education and the increasing embededness of testing, selection and competition. In contrast, the recent 'equality' agenda, with reference to race, gender and disability provide new opportunities for challenging discrimination and exclusion in education. The emerging conjuncture presents a terrain of struggle between different policies, interests and values which will be explored through a small case study of a primary school in an inner city in the north of England.

References

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