

opinion

Inclusion in education, a contemporary view

A full integration system will be of quality when it recognises every student as they are and include them into school life



by Cristina Luna Brosa

Education is a fundamental human right essential for an individual's overall development. Quality education is critical to guarantee a good standard of living for all members of society, especially for people who are more susceptible and need more help because of their personal characteristics.

Quality education must normalise individual differences, understanding and accepting that the system must be adapted to include all forms of learning and different situations. The learning proposal must be designed to respond to all students, whatever their condition, developing all their cognitive, emotional and personal capacities to the maximum. An education system will be of quality when it recognises every student as they are and include them into school life. Accepting the challenge of attending to diversity is an element that enriches the teaching-learning process and brings personal and social advantages for all members of the classroom.

In recent times, and after the entry into force of the 2017 decree on educational inclusion in Catalonia, the inclusive process is going through a delicate moment. Fears and insecurities give way to uncertainty about how inclusion is experienced in schools.

INCOMPLETELY ANSWERED NEEDS

Inclusion implies a view and an attitude towards the person, life, education and society, derived from an integral, "holistic" vision of the human being. We have had an inclusive tradition for many years, which should have been strengthened by official recognition of the need for

resources to promote work on diversity. But the effect has not been as expected. Schools need to think about what they already do well and not only about what they need. It seems that the real meaning of inclusiveness is being lost. It is time to remember the why of inclusion, leaving aside the how. Now we only think and give strength to the how: we need more teachers, we need materials, we need specialised staff ... We NEED... and in this way we are decentralising the capacity of ourselves and placing success in what comes from outside, in what should be the complement and not the essence. We are losing the competence to do it, the focus on possibility and capacity, and we are refocusing on the deficit and what is missing.

No one can deny that education needs more training, resources, and specialisation, which means more staff: more flexible and competent organisations and trained staff. Still, we cannot blame the system's failure only on the fact that these conditions are not met. The biggest and most obvious problem lies in the lack of belief in the individual, diversity, and professionals.

DIFFERENT STUDENTS LEARNING TOGETHER

We forget that difference is a natural and human condition, that school is a fundamental social right, and

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that it has been proven that learning with different learners is not only possible but also beneficial. We must remember that there must be a concrete concept of the learner under the umbrella of inclusion and a favourable expectation towards learning possibilities and capacities, towards possibilities for participation and progression. Underlying the inclusion framework are concepts such as diversity and equity, which correspond to paradigms that should have been superseded by now. These concepts are on the basis of what the social system is. Suppose they are not educated experientially at school. In that case, they cannot be normalised in the social environment, which endangers the collective equilibrium. Too often, it is heard that this child cannot keep up with his peers. What does keep up mean? If he could keep up and do the same as the rest, we would no longer talk about diversity and inclusion. Why are we making the system more rigid? Why are we more demanding with children who have problems developing and learning? Where is the limit of who can keep up and who cannot? What is the pace that can't be kept?

There is a crucial element that could compensate and help in the inclusive process: families. The discourse that defends that 1. the school and the teachers are the ones who have to work for the child, and 2. they often feel alone, is nothing more than a natural consequence of not including families in the process. Parents know their children best and are interested

in making inclusion a success. When the classmates' families are well informed, take part by learning the cases and understand how their children benefit from the situation, they can be an important pillar to help share the institution's commitment to the children and the class group. Professionals working with families, bringing together knowledge and experience with the need, strength, interest and love of families, can help share responsibilities and relieve pressure on the school and teachers.

We must reflect on what is happening. More than ever, we are questioning our inclusive capacity in ordinary schools. It is not always the lack of staff that hinders success, often expectations, beliefs, fears, haste and the need for immediacy are playing us a disservice. We have to recover genuine confidence in the person, ourselves as professionals, and the school as a natural learning space.

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