

Theorizing Professionalism and Morals Principles in Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines professional integrities within the field of inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education is rooted in the philosophy of moral principles, as it concerns issues of equity, access, justice, and care of students with diverse learning needs. Theorists and educators do agree that inclusion is a fundamental right, which is sustained by the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The focus of inclusive education is to provide education regardless of any challenges learners may have. In inclusive education, learners are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high quality instruction, interventions, and supports that enable them to meet success in the core curriculum (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010; Alquraini & Gut, 2012). Internationally, different countries have tried to adopt educational systems that support inclusive education in varying capacities and structures. However, the moral dimensions of inclusion are often lacking in theoretical and practice as well as in inclusion related discussions. The paper highlight the nature of morality within inclusive education, with an examination of moral dilemmas, challenges, and tensions, grounded in empirical evidence, which transpire in the shades of an educator's work.

Key words: *Inclusive education; child rights; moral dilemmas; teaching and Professionalism.*

Conceptualizing Inclusive Education

Inclusion was stipulated in the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education, represented by 92 governments and 25 organizations in Salamanca, Spain (Gajewski, 2017). The inclusion agenda, resulted from the Salamanca Pronouncement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). Among others, the declaration, resulting from the conference, called on governments worldwide to enact laws and policies that support inclusive education. In this regards, the 1994 Salamanca Declaration led to most important reforms on special education worldwide, supporting inclusion and opening the door to students with various learning needs in regular educational structure. Before embarking on particular issues of the discussion, it would seem reasonable in this paper to offer some definitions related to inclusive education as a contested term that might serve as starting point to better understand the terminology. To start with, Booth (2000, p. 78) defines inclusive education as the process of increasing the participation of learners within and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of neighbourhood centres of learning.

Other writers such as Bennett (2009) Hutchinson (2007) Jordan (2007) and McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling (2013) seem to define inclusive education in a similar perspective; they all describe inclusion as a term that denotes to all persons, regardless of ability, are eligible to full and equal participation in all aspects of society, including education. Another definition yet comprehensive meaning explains inclusive education as a system of education in which all children, youths and adults are enrolled, actively participate and achieve in regular schools and other educational programmes regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, without discrimination, through minimisation of barriers and maximisation of resources (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training - MoEVT, 2009, p. 2). Furthermore, inclusive education is at times confused with integration. In some places while integration is used to mean disability, inclusive education pertains to “values and principles, about the type of individuals that a society wants and the kind of education that the society value (Evans & Lunt, 2002). These definitions and many others represent increased right and level of participation in education for each individual in order to attain education that is arguably indistinct. Although these descriptions seem to be general, the practice of inclusive education tends to differ across culture, social, physical, academic and behavioural variations that different individuals need in order to effectively participate in regular learning environment (Wilczenski, 1995). Nevertheless, the extent and conditions of the inclusion of individuals in regular

schools or classrooms varies between countries, regions, and even within districts and schools in particular. Different notions of inclusion and inclusivity have resulted in varied institutional policies and practices, often leading proponents of inclusion to question its effectiveness (Gajewski, 2017). However, while inclusive education is being practised in many countries, evidence suggests that placing students within regular schools does not guarantee inclusion (Gajewski, 2017). Regardless of the ways and the extent to which inclusion is being implemented in different dimensions within educational sector internationally, there is an agreement among theorists and educationists that inclusion is a fundamental human right (Jordan, 2007; Norwich, 2005; Polat, 2011). In this respect, discussion of inclusive education from moral perspective raises significant questions relating to the principles of equity, fairness, justice, and care as they apply to access, opportunities, and learning experiences of students who have special needs, thus stimulating our thinking about the implementation and practice of inclusion in schools and classrooms, from the viewpoint of a learner (Gajewski, 2017; Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1949).

Other inclusion scholars, passionately and unequivocally maintain the idea that inclusive education is a considerable legal, moral and human right (Gordon, 2013). Consistent with Tanzania National Strategy on Inclusive Education which aims at contributing towards achieving the poverty reduction strategy goals and in line with the Education Sector Development Programmes which puts forward the fundamental principle of inclusion as a key strategy, Tanzania is taking efforts at achieving universal and equitable access to education (MoEVT, 2009). The 2009 – 2017 Inclusive Education Strategy clearly articulates that all children, youth and adults in Tanzania have equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings meanwhile identifies objectives that have to be realized. As was previously mentioned, the concept of inclusion has moral foundations and so it promotes ethical principles as well. It is therefore recommended that, educationists and other stakeholders must consider all characteristics of an individual's functioning in relation to features of the proposed placement environment in order to make ethical placement decisions in order to maximize the development of the individual pupil (Little & Little, 2000). Consequently, being ethical by its very nature, in the implementation of inclusive education requires those who device the ideologies, policies and strategies to have a sense of care, fairness, respect, responsibility, duty, and justice. Inclusive education supports the idea that it is right and just for every individual to be equally respected and receive equal educational opportunities in schools and general societal opportunities. It is the duty and responsibility of educational institutions and individuals to guarantee each individual within society is treated with necessary attention and respect,

regardless of her or his differences. In this regards, Booth and Ainscow (1998) emphasizes that inclusive education should focus on taking effort of overcoming barriers that prevent the participation and learning of all children, regardless of their race, gender, social background, sexuality, disability or attainment in schools. Notwithstanding of the above, inclusive education does not only focus on the barriers that learners face, but it has to give attentions on development of cultures, policies and practices in educational systems and institutions, in order for individuals to be able to respond to the diversity of learners and treat them equally (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Thus, in inclusive education and in an ideal inclusive classroom, the needs of all learners are recognized, reinforced, and met. Similarly, all students are occupied, actively participate in meaningful learning environment and they have equal opportunities.

Teaching and Morals Responsibility

The moral principle of inclusive education would suggest that teachers have a central responsibility of treating students in a manner that will ensure their needs are met and their best interests are upheld (Gajewski, 2012). It does not matter how well inclusive policies and practices are articulated the implementation of meaningful learning for students remains with teachers in inclusive classrooms. Teachers have the role to structure the learning environment; they interact with students, parents, and colleagues; establish opportunities; and remove learning barriers (Bennett, 2009; Gajewski, 2012; Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). Although, the role of the school headteacher/head of school has been shown in literature as pivotal for fostering new meaning, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programs as well as building relationships between schools and communities (Riehl, 2000); certainly, much of the commitment to 'do right and good' in inclusive teaching environment remains with teachers who practice the real teaching. Teachers engage in their work, teachers must uphold and promote moral principles to ensure the needs and best interests of students are maintained. Accordingly, principles of equity must be supported and sustained, as "teachers should foster respect, inclusivity, and active engagement" (Gajewski, 2017, p. 6). In this regards, it is necessary for teachers to accept willingly with vitality the fact that they are responsible for the learning of every student in an inclusive classroom. While in classrooms, teachers have to consider and practice of the profession in a just and fair manner. Empirical evidence suggest that teachers' positive attitude toward inclusion has been shown to be exceptionally significant and that factors contributing to this positive attitude include among others the belief that every learner has learning capabilities and the conviction that as teachers, they can make a difference to student learning (Silverman, 2007;

Woloshyn, Bennett & Berrill, 2003). For teachers, teaching as a profession and moral principles are fused together and act concurrently. There are ample empirical and theoretical evidence to suggest the moral nature of teaching profession (*see for instance* Campbell, 2003, 2006; Carr, 2006; Colnerud, 2006; Hansen, 2002; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Gajewski, 2012; Norberg, 2006; Sockett, 1993; 2006; Strike & Soltis, 1992). For example, Campbell (2003) recommends that an ethical teacher represents principles of honesty, integrity, care, respect, and justice, to name a few, and practice these principles in his or her teaching. In making a distinction between the moral behaviour of teachers and their role in the moral development of learners, Campbell (2003) defines moral agency of teachers as “how teachers treat students generally and what they teach them of a moral and ethical nature” (, p. 2). In essence, as established by Gajewski, (2017) the moral agency basically determines teachers’ decision making, practice, and conduct. The need for teachers’ moral knowledge is established and reinforced by Campbell (2006) in following assertion:

Ethical knowledge enables teachers to make conceptual and practical links between core moral and ethical values such as honesty, compassion, fairness, and respect for others and their own daily choices and actions. (p.33)

The above quotation suggests that moral principles such as honesty, integrity, respect, justice, fairness, and care are fundamental for supporting teachers to practice teaching profession in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, studies conducted by Dempsey (1991), Noblit (1991), Rogers (1991) and Webb (1991) revealed and strengthened that effective teaching profession is directly connected to the action of caring. Notwithstanding of these findings, it is argued that the concept of caring in the context of inclusive classrooms goes beyond the affective domain. In this regards, Rogers and Webb (1991) put emphasis explicitly by saying: “caring is the basis for thoughtful educational and moral decision-making, and it requires action”. (p. 174). In view of the empirical evidence, it is the responsibility of teachers to provide high quality, holistic support and focused connections with learners in inclusive classrooms based on a positive perception of common understanding of all learners. Educational systems and structures in Tanzania recognize inclusive education as compulsory to providing education regardless of individual differences. For example the requirements for special teacher education pronounced by pointing out the necessity of training of teachers of children with special needs (MoEVT, 2009). The policy documents insist on compulsory in-service training and re-training of practicing teachers to ensure that teacher’s quality and professionalism. However, the extent to which the policies articulated in various documents are implemented is uncertain. One might want

to ask for example the extent which teachers have the capabilities to teach in an inclusive classroom. Do they really receive relevant training to be able to teach in such classroom? There are without doubt many unanswered questions, but most importantly teachers' insights and attitude towards teaching in inclusive classrooms might need a special attention for exploration. There is only major reason for taking into consideration said earlier, meaningful learning experiences and prospects in an inclusive classrooms rest with practicing teachers.

Morality and Teaching Predicament

Here again comes a question: do teachers have incentive or resources to make them more competent, committed and humble in teaching inclusive classroom? Teaching is by its very nature a very complicated phenomenon where implementing moral principles and making good decisions can be challenging and difficult (Gajewski, 2012; Norberg, 2006; Strike & Soltis, 1992). Most of the time, when teachers are working in inclusive classrooms they meet opposing directions, as they manage competing interests or conflicting demands (Colnerud, 2006), especially when they work with students with disabilities. Teachers face many ethical dilemmas each day in the inclusive classroom. One of critical questions is question is how do teachers know the right way to respond varied students' needs and expectations? The dilemma among others includes trying to solve a problem in a situation in which the teacher must make a challenging choice between two or more options (Gajewski, 2014). Every time, teachers are obliged to succeed and cope with these predicaments on their own, using their personal and professional judgment to monitor their decisions and actions (Courtade and Ludlow, 2008).

One of underlined objectives identified in the Tanzania National Strategy on Inclusive is the widening and strengthening of professional capabilities for inclusive education provision (MoEVT, 2009). However, there are some challenges and tensions that threaten smooth inclusive education provision. Some scholars have argued that lack of in-service training, more teacher training colleges emphasising in general inclusive education and special needs curriculum in particular, more special teacher training colleges, and the continuous work to change people's attitudes towards inclusion remain to be challenges for well-organized and implementation of inclusive classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Krohn-Nydal, 2008). In general, pre-service and in-services training are considered as a significant factor in improving teachers' attitudes towards carrying out of an inclusive policy (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In this regards, preparations of professional teachers intended to support, guide and managing

inclusive classroom are almost not in place in Tanzania. Regardless of the above shortfall, Gajewski (2012) has maintained that to the best of their abilities, teachers make every effort to teach in ways that will benefit their students as they aim to ensure that students are treated with fairness, care, and equity. Such kind of awareness and recognition makes teachers appreciate their roles and responsibilities as professionals in schools (Darling-Hammond and Branford, 2005). It is further argued that understanding and execution of their duty applicably for teachers is what it means to be professionals (Adendorff, 2001). However, teaching as profession is relational by its very nature because standards and codes are limited in addressing the relational nature of teachers' work to help guide their actions and decisions in teaching (Gajewski, 2012, 2017). Even if professional codes and standards establish shared objectives for teachers and provide parameters for the teaching profession, they offer minimal direction to aid teachers in carrying out their professional and ethical responsibilities in inclusive classroom context (Gajewski, 2017). Gajewski's (2017) statement make evident the complexity and in some cases conflicting nature of teaching profession and moral value in an inclusive classroom. For instance, just for teachers being responsible to children under their care, the community in which they live, the profession, the employer and the state (United Republic of Tanzania, 2002 & 2003) is not only challenging, but it requires deep moral consideration, comprehensive professional training and balanced judgment (Gajewski, 2017).

Striking the Balance in an Inclusive Classroom

There is growing body of evidence suggesting that in an inclusive classroom both students with disabilities and those without disabilities can learn effectively (Jordan & McGhie-Richmond, 2014; Rea, McLaughlin & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Timmons & Wagener, 2008). For example, evidence on impact of inclusion on students' achievement recommends that at "the pre-school level pupils who are in inclusive settings make greater progress than those in segregated settings" (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000 in Bennett, 2009, p.3). These confirmations suggest that placing students in inclusive educational settings, where their diverse needs are accepted and valued, positive learning can be achieved, positive change in the life for all learners, and possibly having a positive impact on their future life. On the other hand then, although researches recognize inclusive classroom to be just, equitable, and of value to all individuals, both in education and in society as a whole, questions remain as to how teaching in inclusive classroom can best be implemented in schools. This being the case, there seems to insufficient information to bridge the gap between research and actually practice in inclusive classrooms. For example, concerning the issue fairness in inclusive classroom

which represent the gap of research and practice, Gajewski (2017, p. 12 - 13) poses the following complex and contextual questions

- i. Is it fair to treat all students the same way?
- ii. When is differential treatment justified?
- iii. How can teachers balance equity with fairness?

Indeed, teachers take a major role and responsibility to implement curriculum in inclusive classroom in ways that allow access to a certain category of learners and deny the access to others. Consequently, teachers need to be conscious of their role in selecting what to teach and how to teach given the complex nature of learners in inclusive classrooms. Teachers need to have critical reflexive mind and practice that requires thinking critically about personal beliefs, values and assumptions about diverse learners and how reflexive thinking ideologies impact interpretations and interactions with students (Cunliffe, 2016). In trying to find a balance in order to meet diverse learners' need, teachers need to create healthy relationship between and with students not only to shape the accumulation and expansion of transmitted knowledge and discovery, they form the web of learning culture that determine the value of each learner (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). There are some assumptions that can be made about students' backgrounds such as different socio-economic background and access to resources, about who may need special help, who can flourish with a bit of extra attention and whose needs are too complex to address (Tyler, Yzquierdo, Lopez-Reyna, & Flippen, 2002). These difference should not and are not supposed to hamper learning but they should support and strengthen teachers' decision to make everyone learn.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The general view and circumstance of inclusive education is infused with fear of whether it is possible to fairly treat students with diverse needs. It is critical and appropriate time to clear that doubt and consider ways in which inclusive education can be implemented with professionalism and moral principles. Commitment to delivering high quality research across inclusive education model is also paramount. However, the difficult task ahead of researchers and educators is how to build connection between research, policy and practice. As an overall principle, inclusive education should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation of a more just and equal society. As suggested by Engelbrecht & Snyman (1999) inclusive education is the foundation towards obtaining a just and equal society. For that reason, if the nation wants to create equal opportunity for each person regardless of the socio-economic background and capacities, then, the nation

should start with compressive educational policy that integrate and blend inclusive education.

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