INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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The Search for an Inclusive Pedagogy

BY

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This book is dedicated to Allengary, my wife, for her love and support. Thanks to Sai for always guiding me.

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FOREWORD

In this book, Professor Naicker offers valuable insights and a sociological imagination when we look at the education of children who operate in the margins of our schooling system. The book offers a framework to developing countries on how theories, assumptions, practices and tools need to change to develop a truly inclusive education and training system. Both local and international attempts using a piecemeal approach to transform educational systems have not been successful nor have they led to the transformational changes proposed. In particular, Naicker states that only a 'rupture' in the traditional model of special education can create the necessary conditions for the development of a systemic and comprehensive approach to inclusion.

Developing countries all over the world are often at a loss when it comes to providing a quality education to working class children and the vulnerable. He argues that in order to provide that quality education, vulnerable children and working class children should be brought to the centre of the education system. In other words, to effect systemic inclusion, the mainstream education system should not delegate these functions to some unit within the organisation but take total responsibility of the challenge. Mainstream education systems should take ownership of the challenges facing vulnerable children as they constitute the majority of the schooling population in developing countries.

International research suggests that developing countries are opting for a performance culture at all costs, and the consequence of such thinking is that only top performers benefit. Our research also tells us that the majority of children in developing countries are working class and vulnerable. Therefore, by opting for a performance culture, vulnerable and working class children are alienated. The option that Naicker suggests is an inclusive culture that takes on board the diversity that developing countries are confronted with. He observes that ultimately the key to the success of this proposed transformation rests squarely on the mainstream educational system taking the ownership of the process.

Research also tells us that developing inclusive education systems is a complex task and must take into consideration multiple factors. Naicker lucidly explains that the history of special education must be taken into consideration and should become common knowledge to all mainstream educationists and educators. The important point here is to move away from the psychologisation of failure and standardised tests with a view to understanding the levels of support learners require. Naicker also emphasizes the ideology of barriers to learning in system change. Mainstream systems of education should rupture traditional thinking by not looking at individual deficits but rather what barriers prevent learners from learning.

The two important considerations in Naicker's treatise is that we need to understand history and examine the systemic challenges that are posed to learners. If the mainstream system understands the barriers it presents to children in accessing education, more children will flourish in education systems.

This book captures the social portrait of developing countries and reveals the large number of barriers learners

experience. In a sense these conditions are very compatible with what inclusive education has to offer. The diverse range of barriers in learners' experience in developing countries suggests that inclusive education as an ideology and practice becomes very relevant.

For inclusive education to be successful in developing countries, mainstream systems of education should socialize ordinary teachers on the theory of inclusive education and the shift from the medical model. If all teachers understand the theory and practice of special education and the shift towards inclusive education, it creates space and possibilities for the majority of learners to succeed.

We know that literacy and numeracy performance is one of the biggest challenges faced by developing countries as well as the throughput rate. If we examine the barriers that learners face in numeracy and literacy in the formative years, for example, the lack of a print and numerate culture in the homes, much can be done to ameliorate the situation by understanding those barriers. Inclusive education programmes can very easily address literacy and numeracy if the history of special education and the ideology of barriers to learning is familiar to all teachers and educationists in the system.

A comprehensive and systemic process of inclusion that promotes the development of full-service schools and the training of all teachers in inclusive education in developing countries can place the majority of the children in the mainstream of education. However, it is important that curriculum development is contextualized within the specificities of developing countries. One historical pattern is that developing countries follow developed countries or use 'colonial' models at the expense of vulnerable and working class children. This book offers much promise for ameliorating the

literacy and numeracy challenge by placing working class and vulnerable children at the centre of educational reform.

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