INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE DIFFERENCES TOWARD EQUAL EDUCATION

by:

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Inclusive education had been one of the endeavors of different nations in promoting and ensuring that quality education is being served to everyone, regardless of their differences. As Education for All (EFA) movement had been acclaimed internationally, the concept of inclusion of marginalized and often neglected groups had been a consistent subject for debate. Inclusive education started to be legalized with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Going deeper to its legal point of view, inclusive education was formally established in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which took effect on May 3, 2008. Concerning the education sector, the convention cited in its Article 24 that States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities in attaining and participating in their right to quality education. In line with this, the convention clearly pointed out that inclusive educational system, present at all levels, should be ensured by States Parties.

The rise of inclusivity in education also imposed other considerations in education. One example would be UN’s Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities which was published in 1993. The standard rules laid out that when the need arises, special schools should be considered in the event that normal schools could not cater the various needs of inclusive education.

Stubbs (2008) explained that inclusive education has diverse and various foundation and shaping factors. Stubbs specified some basis and influences as: the realities of the world situation, practical experience activists and advocates; international
governmental and non-governmental agencies, and professional-based movements (quality education, school improvement, school effectiveness, special needs).

Moreover, Stubbs elaborated that inclusive education is sensitive to the respect given to the differences such as gender, ethnicity, age, health status, language, economic status, disability, religion, and other forms of distinctions. In addition to that, McManis (2016) cited that a good indicator of inclusive education is when the school operates and produces students with special needs, who are as competent as students in the mainstream. McManis added that this scenario may happen when the school accepts, understands, and attends to the students’ differences and adversities.

Though inclusive education had been cited and discussed by many, the battle cry had been proven as one of the struggles and overlooked aspect of equality in education. Allan and Slee (2011) presented a result of an evaluation of inclusive education which shown that schools have been failing in inclusion and asserted that schools are not matching the actual requirements of the students with special needs. One problem that surfaced is the different meaning and contextualization of the term “inclusion”.

Armstrong et al (2010) cited that the term inclusive education has various meanings based on the groups and culture where it was presented. Early definitions and explanations always tag inclusion with “special education”, while as times progress, Armstrong added that the term “inclusion” is not just about special education, or students with special needs. It also covered ethnicity, gender, behavior, and other distinct factors that may exclude learners from the mainstream. The broadness and different interpretations of the concept of inclusive education had been one of the imposing factors for its complexity. Furthermore, Slee and Allan (2011) explained that inclusive education does not just concern disabled students, inclusivity in education includes all students who are deemed to have special needs.
Critics and educators have been trying to distinguish if education nowadays are truly catering inclusion and the distinctions of the students. Some emphasizes that achieving total inclusiveness in education still has long road to travel, but trying to ensure that no learner is being left behind is one of the most important steps that educators must accomplish.

There may be challenges and difficulties, but as long as all the stakeholders are exerting their best efforts to bridge the difference of learners, and deliver them all to an equal provision of quality education, then everyone is striving towards inclusive education.

References:


Stubbs, S. (2008) Inclusive Education Where there are few resources. The Atlas Alliance