

Fatma Sabri¹
Nawal Benmostfa, Ph. D. ²
University of Abou Bakr Belgaid, Tlemcen, Algeria

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

Abstract

The desire to create a system where students with special needs receive their education in the general education classroom with non-disabled students is the kind of a critical pedagogy within the educational paradigm. Inclusion does not refer to a physical space it rather refers to a condition or state of being; 'the concept of inclusion implies a sense of belonging and acceptance.' Supported education for inclusion emphasizes that successful inclusion hinges on provision of appropriate supports in the general educational classroom as a basis for establishing a successful learning environment for students. Inclusion is the responsibility of every teacher and every school leader to learn the strategies necessary to make inclusive education possible.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, inclusion, special needs

1. Introduction

Equal opportunities for all types of learners even those with special needs is not a favour but a mindset in which disabled learners feel such a kind of belonging. Likewise, constructing a classroom where disabled students have the same chances to be together with non-disabled ones is a challenge. Overcoming such a challenge is a stepping stone for the creation of an inclusive classroom based on a critical pedagogy. Thus the exclusion and marginalisation of students with learning difficulties/disabilities (henceforth LD) are to be thought of in order to give value of an inclusive classroom. For the sake of giving credits to assessment of educational inclusion, following a critical pedagogy has to be a critical issue.

2. Inclusive Education

Inclusion as an educational reform is the implementation of new paradigms of research on special needs with a certain emphasis on the relation between society and policy. In this regard, Richards & Schmidt (2013) give a very precise and concise definition for inclusion which entails; "*in education, placing all students together for teaching rather than removing some students for separate teaching, e. g. second language students or students with learning disabilities.*" (p. 276). The curricular concept of inclusion implies such a shift from regular education to some changes in regular schools and in special provision. Structuring the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties demands developing schools as cultures based on theoretical framework in which overview of learning is regarded as a social process (Evans, 1997). As such, learning is about the structuring of knowledge and schooling is about fostering structuring of implications for children with learning difficulties. Moving to the practical implications on the educational context as an organizational approach is to be hinged on resources issues (time and skills), organization issues (stages of provision, modifications to special schools, support systems, and co-operation across schools), and external issues (public opinion, and funding) as well as policy development, to reach pathways of progress (Pijl, Meijer, & Hegarty, 1997).

¹ Email: fatma.sabri.belkheir@gmail.com

² Email: nawelmdz@yahoo.fr

The inclusive perspectives on teaching and learning centralize two competing paradigms; the reform of special education or the transformation of mainstream schools. To this end, special responses are to be made in mainstream schools via putting the school as problem-solving organization for the sake of reforming mainstream schools. (Dyson & Millward, 1997). In the same regard, according to Liasidou (2015), in order to achieve sustainable inclusive education reforms, it is necessary to question the educational policy-making and the inclusive classrooms via theorizing the educational change within the context of inclusion based on socio-cultural and whole-school considerations. Similarly, for Meijer & Stevens (1997), restructuring special education provision necessitates a review of the situation, analysis of the problem, and validity of the problem so as to move from problem to perspective in which the teacher plays a key role with regard to conditions and perspectives.

In addition to the teacher as a fundamental factor affecting the educational framework of inclusion, Pijl & Meijer (1997) mention two other major impactful factors which are; school factors, and external factors. Vis-à-vis this concern, Kearney (2011) further explains more aspects which are the cause of unpacking the construct of inclusion, among them; low teacher expectations, teacher attitudes and beliefs, teacher education and professional development, the school principal, school culture, bullying, and at last but not least teacher aides or paraprofessionals. On the other hand, Porter (1997) highlights some critical elements for inclusive schools namely; context, leadership factors (philosophy, funding, and district leadership), and proposes a new approach to special education relying on administrative leadership (practices and strategies, district-based team, regional service sharing), and also proposes a new role for the special educator, as well as strategies for teacher support (staff development for classroom teachers, problem-solving teams, inclusive curriculum and instructional strategies, and multi level instruction).

3. Understanding Integration

According to Söder (1997) integration as a research perspective is ‘*evaluative*’ and ‘*normative*’ in its nature which is bounded by the importance of asking the right question. Accordingly, it is of paramount importance regarding inclusion to question the notion of community whether to be considered as ‘*social relations*’ or ‘*attitudes*’. Therefore, the question of ‘*What is community?*’ is the key to decide on integration in the school context, or school integration within a societal context. On the other hand, integration for Glæsel (1997) is a question of attitude and planning in which teaching in classes with pupils with special needs is affected by the teacher training and the parents’ view of integration.

Beyond schooling, integration is seen as a policy perspective as well. Clarifying goals and definitions in order to respond to the problem are regarded as resources for teachers for an educational organization. In support of planning for integration in schooling, new knowledge and skills are needed, competing integration discourses, decentralization, flexibility and decision-making power, as well as co-operation. Taking into consideration the role of special education for the implementation of integration in order to make the school more comprehensive is the essence of changing schools for the sake of improving integration. Prevailing public opinion, the role of the media, teacher opinion are some external factors affecting integration (Stangvik, 1997).

Inclusion of pupils with learning disabilities in general education settings upon service delivery models for pupils with LD is pictured in neglecting segregated schools, and establishing self-contained classes in regular schools or full inclusion in general education classrooms. In respect of achieving inclusive schools, fundamental school reform, and preserving a continuum of services in the regular school, as well as expanding the role of the special education teacher are lessons to be learned from full inclusion models. Correspondingly, full inclusion as the only option, full inclusion as school improvement, full inclusion with pull-out for anyone, and full inclusion as one option on a continuum of services are the basis of full inclusion models (Zigmond & Baker, 1997).

4. Learning Disabilities

It is necessary when talking about inclusive education to deal with the different learning disabilities that have an effect on learners' behaviours and achievements. According to Wilson (2003), learning disabilities are divided into two concerns: the sensory, physical, and neurological concerns and the social/emotional, speech/language, and cognitive concerns. The first includes vision problems, hearing problems and orthopaedic/neurological impairments and the second contains speech/language disabilities and cognitive delays.

Going deeper, Farrell (2006) when talking about autism and communication difficulties highlights the following: communication and interaction difficulties, difficulties with speech, difficulties with grammar, difficulties with meaning, difficulties with the use of language, and difficulties with comprehension.

Similarly, in favour of establishing educational need for special education in order to make special education eligibility decisions Salvia, Ysseldyke & Witmer (2012) categorize the LD to official student disabilities (like autism and mental retardation), specific learning disability (as emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury speech or language impairment, visual impairment, deafness and hearing impairment, and orthopaedic impairments) as well as other health impairments (such as deaf-blindness as a kind of multiple disabilities and developmental delay).

5. Critical Pedagogy

What is inclusion? *"For many schools, 'inclusion' still means taking on a few disabled pupils and supporting those with a diagnosis of dyslexia."* (Corbett, 2002, p. 9). Viewing through an inclusive lens for the sake of supporting inclusive education necessitates looking for a connective pedagogy where disabled learners can live within walls but without boundaries. In this vain, critical pedagogy is established and suggested. Richards & Schmidt (2013) define critical pedagogy as;

an approach to teaching that seeks to examine critically the conditions under which language is used and the social and cultural purposes of its use, rather than transmitting the dominant view of linguistic, cultural and other kinds of information. Both the process of teaching and learning and its study are viewed as inherently evaluative or ideological in character. (p. 146)

Hence, a critical pedagogy is pedagogy for inclusion based on setting a mainstream context and measuring quality for the purpose of celebrating differences. Inclusive education is not just inclusive schooling and not a 'dump and hope' model (Corbett, 2002).

6. Assessment

Moving deeper within the issue of educational inclusion and critical pedagogy necessitates a certain space of discussion about assessment in relation to this matter because as it is mentioned by Mitchell (2005); *"underpinned by the philosophy that all students belong and can learn in regular schools and classrooms, inclusive education is one of the most dominant and controversial issues confronting educational policy-makers and professionals around the world today."* (p. xiv). Whether regular education or inclusive education, yet assessment still plays a great role as a sine-qua non pillar of education; *"if inclusive education is to gain validity as an indicator of good quality learning, ways need to be found which can measure its success."* (Corbett, 2002, p. 21).

Assessment is based upon legal and ethical considerations which are highlighted by Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer (2012) when talking about 'Section 504 of the Rehabilitation, Act of 1973, Major Assessment Provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and 2004 Reauthorization of

‘IDEA’ as for the laws whereas for ethical considerations; they demonstrate ‘Beneficence, Recognition of the Boundaries of Professional Competence, Respect for the Dignity of Persons, Adherence to Professional Standards on Assessment, and Test Security.’

Furthermore, Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer (2012) argue on four uses of teacher-made tests of achievement namely; to ascertain skill development, to monitor instruction, and to document instructional problems and make summative judgments. According to them; content specificity, testing frequency, and testing formats are the dimensions of academic assessment. Thus, preparing tests is to be based upon certain considerations among them; selecting specific areas of the curriculum, writing relevant questions, organizing and sequencing items, developing formats for presentation and response modes, writing directions for administration, developing systematic procedures for scoring responses and establishing criteria to interpret student performance. In order to detect the potential sources of difficulty in the use of teacher-made tests, there are four core achievement areas of assessment that are; reading, mathematics, spelling, and written language. Seeking progress, Heartland Area Education Agency and the Iowa Problem-Solving Model are two main projects promoted aiming at preparing for and managing progress monitoring as well as preparing for and managing mandated tests for the sake of achieving effective managing classroom assessment on the basis of interpreting data via decision-making rules (ibid).

Moreover, putting assessment concerns uppermost leads to asking very important questions like ‘how to evaluate a test?’ and ‘how do we review a test?’ answering these questions involve taking into consideration test purposes, test content and assessment procedures, scores, norms, reliability, validity, making a summative evaluation. Regarding assessment of academic achievement, among so many others, Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer (2012) call attention to some specific tests of academic achievement namely; stanford achievement test series ‘sesat, sat, and task’, terranova ‘third edition’, peabody individual achievement test–revised–normative update, wide range achievement test–4, wechsler individual achievement test–second edition, and diagnostic achievement battery–third edition. Getting the most out of an achievement test, Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer (2012) assert that it is crucial to use some formal measures:

- Using diagnostic reading measures
- Using diagnostic mathematics measures
- Using measures of oral and written language
- Using measures of intelligence
- Using measures of perceptual and perceptual–motor skills
- Using measures of social and emotional behaviour
- Using measures of adaptive behaviour
- Using measures of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers
- Using technology-enhanced measures

Using assessment results to make educational decisions is regarded as a very critical issue as well as the issue of communicating assessment information especially via written records (collection of pupil information, maintenance of pupil information, dissemination of pupil information) which serves to decide on effective school teams among a number of types of school teams whether school wide assistance teams, problem-solving teams, child study teams, multidisciplinary teams, or individual education plan teams (ibid).

Preserving and compiling information on children demands observation as an assessment tool in inclusive developmentally appropriate settings with certain observation techniques within different activity areas. Observation helps to achieve different types of assessment; diagnostic assessment, performance assessment, continuous assessment, arena assessment, curriculum-based assessment, and play-based assessment. Using checklist and portfolios is beneficial to realize better results of observation as well as keeping children’s different

records; anecdotal record, running record, event recording, duration recording, interval recording, and latency recording (Miller, 1996). Conducting systematic observations appeals for preparation, data gathering, and data summarization for the sake of evaluating observed performances of different sampling behaviour regarding contexts, times, and behaviours. Assessing behaviour through observation is bounded by some general considerations either live or aided-observation, obtrusive versus unobtrusive observation and contrived versus naturalistic observation (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Witmer, 2012).

According to Wilson (2003, p. 175), Selecting assessment tools and procedures for special educational needs in the early years which is a critical period can be confined via considering some critical questions;

1. Are the materials and procedures reliable and valid?
2. Are the materials and procedures child friendly?
3. How much training is required to administer the assessment?
4. What adaptations, if any, are provided to meet the needs of children with physical, sensory, or other impairments?
5. What role do parents have in administering this assessment?
6. What was the cultural orientation of the normative sample (if norm referenced)? Were efforts made to provide norms on a separate sample or to include minority cultural groups in the sample? Are non-English forms available?

7. Conclusion

In a nutshell, inclusive education is one of the most controversial issues facing policymakers and education professionals around the world. It is based on the philosophy that all students can learn in ordinary schools and classrooms. It is clear that there is a global trend that aims at integrating the disabled into ordinary school and in public life. Those interested in integration policy emphasize the right of people with disabilities to live, learn and work, and to enjoy leisure time in an environment with the least restrictions whenever possible to increase their freedom.

Out of personal dignity, the environment should provide the necessary support to achieve maximum personal growth, communication with others, self-expression and personal relationships at school and beyond. It is hoped that developing countries will benefit from the mistakes of developed countries when they establish separate institutions and schools for children with serious disabilities. The avoidance of the establishment of expensive, separate schools for those with serious disabilities leads to unnecessary spending. Those who follow this approach have often had the side effects of alienating disabled students and isolating them from society rather than preparing them for a life of full integration.

Critical pedagogy is a remedy for the illness of excluding learners with LD and is needed now more than ever since the process of inclusion is of paramount importance in all fields of education. Teaching and learning under the umbrella of inclusion based on a critical pedagogy is regarded as one of the most crucial movement within the actual educational reforms and the teaching/learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) is not an exception. In contrast, this issue is still lacking practical research on the spot and especially the assessment of it as well as the assessment based on its procedures. Attempts to highlight the gloomy picture about this research area need to be cultivated, raised, nurtured, and cherished in order to reach valid results which can be applied in the real current situation.

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