

Foreword about the Inclusive Education Part

Inclusion Education: a Burning Issue for Researchers around the World

On January 16 and 17, 2020 was held in Lebanon, the 1st edition of the international REACH conference organized in partnership between the NGO T.I.E.S (Together for Inclusive Educational Systems) and the American University of Beirut. Meeting under the acronym Research for Education Accessibility Challenges, 31 participants from Lebanon, Jordan, France and Canada wished to contribute to open wider the doors to education for all in an inclusive aim. The crisis prevailing in many countries, and amplified by the COVID-19 requires education systems to be rethought so that they no longer contribute to maintaining or even increasing the inequalities already present in our societies. In this context, scientific research on the implementation of inclusive education is crucial for the improvement of our education systems.

Thus, following the recommendations of the latest Guide to Ensuring Equity and Inclusion in Education (UNESCO, 2017), the objectives are to 1. clarify the concepts underlying inclusive education, 2. question the relevance of general policy declarations about it, 3. analyze the structures and systems implemented to support it, and 4. observe the practices that can contribute to promoting it. However, there cannot be only one way to develop inclusive education, and it cannot claim universalism, as its implementation is determined by the local realities in which it takes place. It is therefore essential to collect data related to the experiences and needs of education stakeholders in order to define a strategy specific to each country, each region and each local community.

Few scientific events in the Middle East contribute to the theme of inclusive education.. Through four working sessions, the participants in this conference were able to successively think about the Lebanese school and how to move from words to deeds, the diversity and the inclusive practices to respond to it based on field experiences in Lebanon, the challenge of moving from school to employment and finally, at the very basis of inclusion in Society, the schooling. Three of the five articles presented in this issue deal specifically with the reality of the Lebanese school and two deal with more general issues.

Asma Azar and Viviane Bou Sreih highlight the reality, challenges and issues involved in making the Lebanese school truly inclusive. This change requires a shift in the conceptual representations of inclusive education held by both teachers and principals, and it is on these that Basma Fangieh and Joumana Akiki are working. But inclusive education is not a mere recommendation that should fall on the heads of the school stakeholders, and it has a chance to develop only in a process of self-determination, which is the subject of the preliminary

investigation conducted by Shaza Ismail. The findings of these researchers are not, however, limited to this local context and can be applied more broadly to many education systems. Among these common reflections is also the question of formative evaluation, which could help teachers to adopt inclusive practices, especially in primary school, and which Nicole Monney ask. Whatever the issues and the challenges that arise in local realities, inclusive education must face institutional and conceptual resistance everywhere to take its place in education systems, as Hervé Benoit shows us.

The REACH Initiative was an opportunity for participants who were not familiar with it to discover the reality and complexity of the Lebanese school system, but also offered a great opportunity for all to reflect on inclusive practices and share success stories. By bringing together researchers, practitioners, education students and NGO leaders, this event put into perspective the many initiatives aimed at fostering the educational success of all students. It also gave rise to new collaborations between partners all working towards a common goal: inclusive education.

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