INCLUSIVE AND CARING EDUCATION:
G20i Review and Survey Report 2020

GLOBAL CHALLENGE & G20i EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated an ongoing global need for social justice. It highlights wide gaps between ideals and practices pertaining to the shared goals of quality and equality in education. These gaps are evident across the most and least wealthy of countries. In particular, the pandemic has unmasked different forms of discrimination and exclusion, marginalising children and young people who are already disadvantaged. With schools closed across 192 countries, affecting 9 out of 10 learners worldwide, deep divides in access to education have been brought to the fore (New Statesman, 2020; Lui, 2020). With little to no practical support for out of school learning, vulnerable students are at higher risk of starvation, loneliness, mental ill-being, and physical and psychological abuse (Maguire, 2020), homelessness, financial difficulties and gang exploitation (National Youth Agency, 2020), as well as cyber bullying, and sexual exploitation (NSPCC Learning, 2020). Furthermore, as fear and isolation spark hatred and narratives of blame (Arigatou, 2020), the urgent need for systemic transformation in education that promotes social cohesion and harmony in the face of growing diversity across G20 countries is starkly revealed.

Many religious/faith/spiritual organisations and communities have long played an important part in reaching out to the excluded, caring for the vulnerable, and encouraging equality in education. During the pandemic, these organisations and communities have been particularly active in identifying and helping those most at risk, engaging multiple stakeholders, and collaboratively making the provision of quality education more accessible (New Statesman, 2020; Arigatou International, 2020). Grounded in universal human values, such as dignity, mutual appreciation, love, empathy, and respect, different faith-inspired initiatives have played a significant part in filling the gaps wrought by school closures and isolation. Valuable lessons can be learned from these initiatives that may serve as the basis for compelling and evidence-informed recommendations for the G20 leaders when considering educational transformation.

By establishing an Education Task Force, the G20 Interfaith Forum will be able to draw on insights from relevant faith-inspired practices to articulate a forward-looking vision of reimagined education. To this end, the Task Force, in collaboration with the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) Research Institute, launched (1) a Desk Review, and (2) a Survey, aimed at deepening our understanding of inclusive and caring education, and identifying educational programmes where religious and faith inputs are central to their underpinnings. This exploration illustrated that at the core of a common global agenda of quality, equality, and social cohesion are practices of inclusive and caring education, with many inspirational examples linked to approaches anchored in faith. (The term *faith* is used broadly here, to include religion, faith, belief and spirituality.)

This G20i Education Task Force report summarises key findings from the desk review and questionnaire survey, including the emergent understandings of inclusive and caring education from a faith perspective, three priority areas, and faith-inspired proposals under each. These insights from the Task Force exploration can serve as the basis for consultation with global experts who would help identify relevant policy recommendations.

EMERGENT UNDERSTANDINGS & PRIORITY AREAS

The Task Force's Desk Review brings to light the emerging global consensus that inclusive education should be a core policy priority (UNESCO, 2008; 2009; 2020; Council of Europe, 2015). Inclusive education has been linked to short and long-term impacts on children and young people, including enhanced motivation and academic successes; reductions in bullying and violence; increases in self-confidence and friendships; the development of entrepreneurial skills such as team work and collaboration; and heightened experience of belonging and community (Mag et al, 2017; Gottfredson, 1997; New Brunswick Assoc., 2020; Hoskeri, 2016; The Understood Team, 2020). In addition, increased social cohesion at school level has been recognised to have impacts on wider communities, improving mutual understanding, trust and civic participation (Rieser, 2008; Fonseca, Lukosch & Brazier, 2019).

The Task Force's Survey underscores the roles of faith actors and faith communities in promoting a culture of respect, care and compassion and supporting the most vulnerable. In a values-shy political and economic climate, many faith communities have been articulating and encouraging lived values to underpin inclusive and interfaith education through, for instance, modelling respect, care, empathy, equality, and relational responsibility. Faiths' leadership and partnership have been regarded as significant to educational transformation post-Covid.

Understanding Inclusive and Caring Education

The Task Force's inquiries have brought forward understandings of inclusive and caring education with an emphasis on faith-inspired experiences. They highlight the importance of:

a) recognising and respecting the intrinsic worth of all students, and being available and accessible to all, regardless of student's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, beliefs, and other backgrounds
b) focusing on the whole child, and nurturing their holistic well-being, including the physical, social-emotional, intellectual, moral, cultural, and spiritual development
c) honouring students' diversity, valuing their difference, and being responsive to their evolving needs in all aspects of learning, development and well-being
d) creating safe and caring learning spaces and promoting cohesive learning communities
e) attending to students' voice respectfully, appreciating what everyone brings to the educational setting, and advocating solidarity
f) bringing people of diverse backgrounds together and supporting all learners to develop transformative collective action

Such understandings are the basis for innovative proposals of inclusive education that can inform policy recommendations to meet the challenges for social cohesion and mutual flourishing during Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

Priority Areas for Policy Recommendations and Actions

The Task Force's analysis of faith-inspired initiatives identifies three priority areas to explore in a cross-sectional effort to promote inclusive and cohesive societies through education:

1) Teachers' professional development
2) Innovative approaches to and practices of inclusive and caring education
3) Opportunities for co-creating safe, caring and inclusive learning spaces

Diverse faith-inspired practices stress not only the central importance of these topics in policy formulation but also practical avenues towards implementation.

FAITH-INSPIRED PRACTICES AS A BASIS FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Professional Development for School Leaders, Teachers & Caregivers
Various faith-inspired practices demonstrate the transformative potential of educators' professional learning. Such learning/training is aimed at:
- developing awareness of and sensitivity towards diversity in the classroom, with special attention to the needs of girls and vulnerable groups
- enhancing knowledge, skills, abilities and strategies to develop inclusive, appreciative and collaborative learning environments
- increasing confidence in facilitating experiential, dialogic and relational learning
- boosting capacities to provide learning opportunities through virtual and digital tools

B. Innovative Approaches to Inclusive and Caring Education
Faith-inspired approaches and practices in formal, informal and non-formal contexts have provided thought-provoking ideas for ensuring quality and equality in education:

Inclusive Curriculum
- Focusing on holistic well-being (beyond academic standardisation), including human dignity, mutual appreciation and acceptance, respect, solidarity and belonging
- Incorporating interfaith learning and religious literacy, and ensuring culturally, linguistically and religiously pluralist and inclusive curricula contents
- Fostering core human values, attitudes, and ways of being key to living together
- Promoting critical thinking and critical awareness of interfaith issues affecting societies
- Connecting learning to local realities and global concerns

Transformative Pedagogy
- Integrating experiential and collaborative learning in classrooms to encourage friendship across divides, and enhance ethical, social and relational awareness
- Empowering students to inquire and examine contexts, values, attitudes and behaviours
- Applying intercultural and interfaith dialogue in all domains of teaching and learning
- Recognising multiple identities, beliefs, worldviews, and diverse ways of knowing
- Incorporating contemplative practice, such as interfaith prayer, mindfulness, meditation, silent walk in nature, deep listening, circle-time reflection …

Empowering Engagement
- Encouraging civic engagement and service learning, esp. girls' and other vulnerable students' participation, and connecting education with community development
- Partnering with faith communities, local businesses, enterprises, and NGOs in co-creating inclusive learning communities within and beyond the classroom
- Strengthening links and collaboration between schools from different faith backgrounds
- Engaging parents, caregivers, families, and religious/faith actors in lifelong learning.

C. Co-Creating Inclusive Learning Spaces
Various practices to bridge the technology gaps in communities suggest important insights for co-creating inclusive and equitable learning spaces:
- Attending to all dimensions of learning spaces, e.g. social-emotional, ethical, relational
- Providing appropriate equipment and infrastructure for all to access online and digital learning platforms
- Empowering young people to be collaborators in co-creating inclusive learning spaces
- Enhancing educators and caregivers' capacities to maintain safe online learning spaces and protect vulnerable students from misinformation, propaganda and abuse

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