Inclusive and Caring Education: Quality, Equality and Social Cohesion
An Education Task Force for the G20 Interfaith Forum

In Partnership with Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace (GHFP) Research Institute

The Challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted wide policy gaps in both wealthier and less wealthy countries to achieve the shared goals of quality and equality in education. In particular, the pandemic has unmasked different forms of discrimination and exclusion, marginalising children and young people who are already disadvantaged. Without structural support of schooling (due to widespread school closures), 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), and cyber bullying, and sexual exploitation (NSPCC Learning, 2020).

A Faith/Interfaith Response, and Inclusive and Caring Education

For long, religious/faith/spiritual organisations and communities have played an important part in reaching out to the excluded, caring for the vulnerable, and encouraging equality in education. During the pandemic, these communities have been particularly active in identifying and nurturing those most at risk, engaging multiple stakeholders, and collaboratively supporting the provision of quality education accessible to everyone (New Statesman, 2020; Arigatou International, 2020). In doing so, they offer innovative approaches that can help inform educational policy worldwide. Central to a common global agenda of quality, equality and social cohesion are faith-inspired practices of inclusive and caring education.

Inclusive education has been defined varyingly: some emphasise the rights of all students to access education so as to "grow side by side to the benefit of all" (UNICEF); some focus on preventing discrimination "on the basis of socially-ascribed or perceived differences" (UNESCO); some highlight the need to recognise the rights and needs of minority groups within mainstream schools (British Council); others are "concerned with overcoming barriers to the full participation of all students in the culture, curricula and community" (Sautner, 2008, 136). Drawing these together, inclusive education can be understood as: (a) a fundamental human right of all persons, (b) an imperative to ensure equality and quality in education, (c) a principle to respect the inherent dignity of all students, (d) the recognition of the diversity of students' needs, and their abilities to contribute to each other's learning and the goodness in society, (e) a process to proactively review and reform educational policy, culture and practice to sustain continued commitment to the well-being of all students.

Caring education is rooted in the ethics of care (Noddings, 2013), ethical education (Gill & Thomson, 2020), and religious teachings (Barnes, 2009). Drawing on principles and values, such as, compassion, hospitality, authenticity and interdependence, caring education respects the whole child, and takes a relational approach to upholding human dignity in each person. Thus caring education is concerned with human relationship that transcends roles within the education system and schools. It seeks ways for children and young people to develop ethical capacities that can enable their equitable participation in the school community, and beyond. These involve honouring diversity, accepting difference, and actively desisting discrimination.

Inclusive and caring education is encapsulated by UN General Comment (No. 4, para 11) as:

> a process of **systemic reform** embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide **all students** of the relevant age range with an **equitable** and **participatory** learning experience and environment that best **corresponds to their requirements and preferences**.

This description provides a clear pathway for governments, policymakers, and educational leaders when examining systemic transformation. It can also guide school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in terms of how to create an inclusive and caring culture in schools.

Research has shown that inclusive and caring education is essential for better quality experience and more equality in access for all students (National Research Council, 2004; Rashid and Tikly, 2010). Inclusive and caring education tends to place relationship and relational processes at the core of teaching and learning, which not only strengthen relationships amongst all students, and between students and teachers, but also further enrich wider community relational resilience and cohesiveness (Gergen & Gill, 2020). It provides opportunities for students' civic participation, including the participation of vulnerable groups, for social change (Ainscow, 2007; Messiou, 2012; 2017).

Education Task Force and Re-Imagining Education Post-Covid

This global pandemic will change human society in fundamental ways. It has highlighted strong links between educational approaches and societies' resilience in the face of a global crisis, and the need for systems that are inclusive and caring. Education is at the core of re-imagining *building back better.* Systems of schooling have been deeply disrupted and thus require re-imagination and renewal. Indeed, educational transformation has been identified internationally as central to post-COVID reforms.

Three areas deserve priority attention:

1) Teachers' professional development, especially towards enabling teachers to be more skilled at facilitating dialogic and collaborative learning in a classroom of rich diversity;
2) Innovative approaches and practices of inclusive and caring education, notably in engaging girls, and other vulnerable students;
3) Technology-assisted opportunities for co-creating safe, caring and inclusive learning spaces, including through digital platforms.

By establishing an Education Task Force, the G20 Interfaith Forum can draw on relevant faith-inspired practices and models and ensure a well-informed vision of 'reimagined education'. To this end, the Task Force launched (1) Desk Review and (2) Questionnaire Survey, aimed at deepening our understanding of inclusive and caring education, and identifying educational programmes where religion and faith are central underpinnings.

Consultation and Recommendations

The Education Task Force's exploration will support G20 Interfaith Forum regional consultations in different continents, starting in Europe, thus informing specific and overall recommendations to the G20 leaders.

The Consultation follows the G20 Interfaith Forum's process for thematic engagement. It will involve online consultation events, with a mix of plenaries, roundtables and dialogue groups. Up to 50 experts will provide written feedback, including religious, faith and spiritual leaders, policymakers, educators, researchers, leaders of G20i partner institutions, and young people. The Consultation will offer spaces for an interactive and co-creative exchange and in-depth dialogue. The objectives are (a) make policy recommendations, (b) identify practical follow-up projects, and (c) support implementation of significant ideas.

The Consultation will pave the way towards meaningful follow-up recommendations for high-level discussions during the G20 Interfaith Forum in Saudi Arabia in October 2020.

The Task Force

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