

# **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 educational inclusion, approaches driven by care, and support for social cohesion. In particular, the pandemic further unmasks the inequalities in access to education and learning opportunities at multiple levels. It has exacerbated different forms of discrimination and exclusion, marginalising children and young people who are already vulnerable. At the same time, the crisis also underlines the complex intersections of poverty, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, health and well-being and education.

Without the structural support of schooling due to widespread school closures, children and young people who are disadvantaged socially, economically, culturally and religiously are excluded from education. Vulnerable children and young people are at higher risk, including of neglect, starvation, lack of care, loneliness, mental ill-being, and physical and psychological abuse (Maguire, 2020), as well as of homelessness, financial difficulties and gang exploitation (National Youth Agency, 2020), internet abuse, cyber bullying, and sexual exploitation (NSPCC Learning, 2020).

### **A Faith/Interfaith Response and Inclusive and Caring Education**

For long, religious, faith and spiritual organisations and communities have played an important part in reaching out to the excluded, caring for the vulnerable, and encouraging values-based education. During the Covid-19 pandemic, these communities have been particularly active in identifying and nurturing those most at risk of exclusion, engaging collaboratively with stakeholders at all levels to support the provision of quality education for all (New Statesman, 2020; Arigatou International, 2020). In doing so, they offer innovative approaches that can benefit education policy makers worldwide. Principally pertinent to a common global agenda of social cohesion are faith-inspired commitments and contributions to 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” (e.g. gender, ethnic/social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition, ability) (UNESCO); some highlight the need to recognise the rights and needs of minority (cultural, linguistic, religious) 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, p.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 a notion that derives from ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2013), ethical education (Gill & Thomson, 2020), and religious teachings (Barnes, 2009). It draws on principles and values of compassion, hospitality, authenticity and interdependence, and celebrates human relationships and deep friendship. It takes a relational approach to upholding the inherent dignity of each person. Thus caring education is concerned with all relationships that transcend roles within the education system and schools, and seeks ways for children and young people to develop ethical capacities in their relationships within the life of a school community, and beyond.

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, especially the participation of vulnerable groups (such as girls, students with special educational needs and disabilities, students from ethnic or religious minorities, and those living in poverty or suffering from physical or mental ill-health) 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 reimagining *building back better*. Systems of schooling have been deeply disrupted and thus require renewal and reimagination. Educational transformation has been identified internationally as central to post-COVID reforms.

Two areas deserve priority attention:

- (1) support for reforms grounded in innovative approaches to inclusive and caring education, (notably in supporting vulnerable communities), and
- (2) support for co-creating inclusive and safe learning spaces, e.g. through digital platforms.

By establishing an **Education Task Force**, the G20 Interfaith Forum can draw on relevant faith/interfaith approaches and models, as well as wider research that translate ideals for inclusive and caring education into well adapted practices. To this end, the Task Force will launch a research that involves a desk review and a questionnaire survey, aimed at deepening our understanding of inclusive and caring education, and identifying educational programmes where religion, faith and spirituality are central underpinnings to curriculum, pedagogy, learning environment, and community engagement. The research will ensure a well-informed vision of ‘reimagined education’, enriched by faith/interfaith inspired approaches.

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.

## **Task Force Consultation**

The Consultation follows the recommended processes for G20 Interfaith Forum’s thematic engagement. It will involve a two-day online event, with a mix of plenaries/roundtables and dialogue groups. Up to 40 participants will take part, including religious, faith and spiritual leaders, policymakers, educators, researchers, leaders of G20 Interfaith Forum partner institutions, and young people. The meeting 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.

To do so, participants might, for example, in sub-groups, evaluate 3-5 significant case studies highlighted by the Task Force, and propose *a set of recommended good practices and processes* for integrating religion, faith and spirituality in public education aimed at inclusion, equality and quality in education, leading to social cohesion. Such recommendations might be *piloted in selected schools* in the G20 countries. Equally, the group might consider drafting *guidelines for religious, faith and spiritual actors, leaders and influencers* in actively supporting inclusion and care in education. Furthermore, the Consultation could reflect on ways to create *opportunities for teachers’ professional development* that help enrich their understandings of and practices in facilitating religious, faith and spiritual communities’ participation in and contributions to inclusive and caring education.

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.

## **Contact the Task Force**

Dr Scherto Gill  
Senior Fellow  
GHFP Research Institute  
199 Preston Road  
Brighton, East Sussex  
BN1 6SA United Kingdom  
Visiting Fellow, University of Sussex  
Email: [scherto.gill@ghfp.org](mailto:scherto.gill@ghfp.org)

Prof Katherine Marshall  
Senior Fellow  
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and  
World Affairs  
Georgetown University, USA  
Executive Director,  
World Faiths Development Dialogue  
Email: [km398@georgetown.edu](mailto:km398@georgetown.edu)

## References

- Ainscow, M. (2007). "From Special Education to Effective Schools for all: A Review of Progress so far." In L. Florian (ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education*, 146–159. London: SAGE.
- Arigatou International (2020), "Faith Inspired Organizations in Asia Supporting, Protecting and Empowering Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Webinar hosted by *Arigatou International*, June 15, 2020. <https://youtu.be/CH7Xwe6G5g0>
- Barnes, P. (2009) *Religious Education: Taking Religious Differences Seriously*, Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, London
- Gergen, K. & Gill, S. (2020). *Beyond the Tyranny of Testing: Relational Evaluation in Education*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Gill, S. & Thomson, G. (eds.) (2020). *Ethical Education: Towards an Ecology of Human Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Maguire, K. (2020) *COVID-19- the Impact on Children and Families*, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Messiou, K. (2012). *Confronting Marginalisation in Education: A Framework for Promoting Inclusion*. London: Routledge.
- Messiou, K. (2017) "Research in the Field of Inclusive Education: Time for a Rethink?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 21 (2): 146–159.
- National Research Council (2004) *Engaging schools: Fostering high schools students' motivation to learn*. Washington D. C: The National Academies Press
- National Youth Agency (2020) *Out of Sight: Vulnerable Young People – Covid-19 Response*, New Statesman (2020) "Education: Making Up for Lost Time". in "Remaking the world after coronavirus: A global policy forum", *New Statesman Spotlight*, June 12, 2020.
- Noddings, N. (2013) *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- NSPCC (2020) "Online safety during coronavirus", *NSPCC Learning*, London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/>
- Rashid, N., and Tikly, L. (2010) *Inclusion and Diversity in Education: Guidelines for Inclusion and Diversity in Schools*, Madrid: British Council
- Sautner, B. (2008) "Inclusive, safe and caring schools: Connecting factors", *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 2008, Vol. 36, No. 1 & 2, pp. 135-167