EDUCATION FOR ALL: DISABILITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

WEEK 1 – WHY INCLUSION?
VIDEO STEP TRANSCRIPT – WHY SOCIAL INCLUSION MATTERS

Inequality in the world is the foremost social problem, which we as a human species have ever had to deal with in the last few millennia and which we today have with us in complex forms. There have been many social attempts in contemporary times to deal with this. And so gladly we now in the 21st century, which is characterised by more democracy than there has ever been before, live in an era which is generally quite conscious of rights and equalities. But social inequality is still with us.

To help us reduce our inequalities around the world, we have come up with a term "social inclusion." The term relates to and is sometimes used in place of terms such as social stability, social well-being, nation building, and even terms such as peace and social justice. Now because of its relationship with these other terms, it can be and is actually used to mean quite different things in different times. The context of the person using the term often is what gives it its content. So it really depends on who is using it.

The way we as social scientists are tending to use the term now is to try to encompass all of the different ways through which the processes of inclusion and exclusion, mainstreaming and marginalisation, and privileging and discriminating play themselves out in society. We are now attempting to make the term more rigorous.

Now, what do I mean by this? I'm trying to say that in our attempt to be rigorous, we in the social sciences, as opposed to politicians who may wish to use the term in more restrictive ways, are moving towards using the term to acknowledge that there are many forms of exclusion, any forms of othering, many forms of marginalisation and discrimination that are taking place around us all the time -- many of which we are often blind to.

Difference is expressed in infinitely rich ways around us. This is what we now need to understand. There are differences amongst ourselves that we don't see. We have to learn how to see them and come to respect those who demonstrate those differences. This is what the wonder of our humanity is all about.

Now there are also, of course, differences that we do see and don't like -- those of race and gender are the foci

now of many struggles in our world to be more equal. But we have tended to rank our differences and made some more important than others. In this process, we have committed great social injustices on people. Disability, as an idea, is one of them. The way in which we have come to think of disability is not just a personal tragedy for an individual, but it is also a social category which we have come to stigmatise and marginalise. In our attempts to be more rigorous, we have to do better.

Doing better requires us to understand that every single human situation involving more than one person involves a certain degree of power. Power as a factor is never absent in our relationships with one another. Personally, for myself, I've begun to think of social cohesion not just as something which happens at a policy or a collective level -- as something that happens out there -- but also in ways which begin to recognise the small and large ways, the personal and the social, through which power is exerted. And to think of social cohesion, therefore, as a much more complex experience in our lives.

And so I'm asking that when we think of social cohesion now, it is not just about the questions of race, class, gender, language, ability, and sexuality as they happen out there. It is about how all of those things also play themselves out at the personal level. Why is this new approach important? It is important because the question of trust, which is so central to social cohesion has to be built from the bottom up ourselves and validated repeatedly from the top down from others.

In terms of this, politicians need to behave in ways that engender trust. They need to build institutions, schools, hospitals, transport facilities, places of worship and entertainment in ways that bring people together in trustful and respectful ways.

These are crucial but it also involves all of us. It is a two-way process which demands of each of us that we demonstrate it in our personal lives. This demonstration of our behaviour from the top and to ourselves is a powerful, ethical injunction, particularly to those of us who are teachers.

We have to bring to our teaching unconditional respect for all of our learners and students. All the awareness that we bring to race, class, and gender, therefore, must be present when we think of disability, which is what this course is all about. People whom we think of as being disabled have the full range of potentialities that all other human beings have and they, therefore, demand our unconditional respect.