

# Concepts of social cohesion and equality in education



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The Personal is Political: Why do we let this happen? This age old saying indicates that the choices we make, the way we look, the way we act and present ourselves with and to other people, are “ political” and defines our political orientation, as society dictates we have to look a certain way.

But... Who says so? ... The Person is Political is a liberal feminism theory, identifying that Personal problems are Political problems, as they are as a result of “ political” systematic oppression. A rallying cry for many feminists in the 60’s and 70’s, in their underlying message, in writings, readings and consciousness raising. Relating to the theory and resonating with the feminists cry, Marxism removed the focus away from struggling individuals and onto group struggling, ratifying the only way to effect real change is to do so collectively! Concurring with this ideology, Durkheim further cited by Filloux, stated society is bigger than us and shapes our thoughts and actions - the collective conscious, mechanical solidarity with sameness and social bonds based on shared morality, uniting members.

This essay will look at supported published literature, how it is understood by the leaders of thought in this field, validating and correlating the shared language to describe and defend my own practice in the community of education.

How are we faring against social, economic, cultural and political ideologies? Is it just words? It is my belief, fairness and equality for all has still not been achieved and is an ever evolving work in progress. The differences in society are our connections. Our cultural norms are tacit and white privilege is asking us to challenge them daily and understand what is in “ Our

Knapsacks”. We as practitioners, do have the power of inertia to intercede between the individual learner and stakeholders to collectively effect real change to ensure a better society for all. “ *Ireland’s changing demographic over the last 10 years has helped to shape a more socially and culturally diverse society. There is no doubt that Ireland will remain a diverse society and it is important that we celebrate and harness this diversity and ensure that our communities are inclusive*”. Speech by Minister Stanton – Equality Then, Now & Future: Creating a more Equal & Inclusive Society

Key concepts and theories will explain real life practices and demonstrate the obligation to promote a critical analysis of social change and inclusion, in the context of the social, cultural and political frameworks. Critical reflection and ethics within daily practice trigger theories of social change, inclusion, quality and diversity in my role as an educator. A learner who is Dyslexic, “ Stephanie” (not her real name) is the genesis of the case study and consequently support the growth of this essay. In order to understand other cultures, the lived experience of inequality and inclusion, or lack of will be categorised by three levels of the Micro, Meso and Macro. Taking this into consideration, her lived perspective will evaluate the extent to which Adult and Further Education includes marginalized social groups, what should be contained in an inclusive curriculum and the sense of agency to provide a comfortable supportive environment to enable her to deal with society’s barriers.

Critical factors such as equality form our mind-sets within particular cultures. The particular culture within our families, organisations and government are the markers of difference and operate at different levels in responding to <https://assignbuster.com/concepts-of-social-cohesion-and-equality-in-education/>

diversity. Possessing an understanding of what is in “ my knapsack” as a practitioner, Peggy McIntosh (McIntosh, 2016) enabled me to check my own assumptions and re-evaluate, “ Who and what I am” and “ Who and what I am not - The Other”.

Micro level considers the teaching and learning viewpoints at individual levels in Adult and Further Education. Long gone are the days of “ I Teach, You listen!” approaches, the theory of developing intellect and not listening to the learners voice is non-productive.

The importance of emotions are fundamental in the development to the functioning of an inclusive democratic society. How can I let my learners see that I truly care about their progression, if I cannot demonstrate empathy? Sharing my journey of Lifelong Learning, in a professional and legitimate manner allowing the language of emotions to be present within the classroom, is crucial in the establishment of trust building of respectful relationships. In addition, concurring with Filloux, practitioners should adopt to a discipline of sociology, providing for successful structures and facilitation of learning, in conducive learning environments. *“ The teacher of the future is thus one who will manage to live out the pedagogical wish of the sociologist..”* (Filloux, 1993)

During “ Stephanie’s” Wk1 Day 1, Induction Week on a yearlong Level 5 Office Administration Course, through Icebreaker introductions, “ Stephanie” disclosed she had not been interviewed or applied for the course herself and was not happy about “ having” to attend. As she had not applied for the course her negative attitude could be somewhat understandable. “

Stephanie” had received a phone call from the organisation, the day prior to commencement of the course and instructed to arrive for class the following day at 8. 30am. This relaxed day enabled Tuckman’s Formation Stage to develop, empowering learners to share experiences, develop relationships and build confidence and self-worth.

On Day 2, following reflection of the previous lesson, further discussions unfolded with “ Stephanie” sharing her bad experiences in school to the group. Relationships were emerging, with other learners demonstrating sympathetic responses. Admitting how she struggled with reading, confessing how daily she was publically humiliated by having to read out loud and when she refused to do so, was labelled troublesome. She was regularly called “ stupid” or “ dumb” by both the teachers and peers and often sent to sit outside the headmistress’s door, when she became argumentative. In her own admission, she said it was easier to start an argument in the classroom rather than feel useless. “ Stephanie” felt the only person she developed a relationship with, was the School Secretary. “ She took the time to listen to me!” This school secretary had recognised she was different and suggested her best approach to improve her performance in school would be to go to her doctor, and get a psychological assessment conducted. The school would receive government funding to support learners with additional needs and the school would be in better position to support “ Stephanie” with her studies. As a result of that conversation, “ Stephanie” felt she had personally failed, in addition to the school system failing her, so she dropped out of school, after her Junior Certificate.

However, she did go to the doctors who confirmed in a psychological report that “ Stephanie” was Dyslexic.

Emile Durkheim suggests Anomie is a lack of moral standards in a society. Unfortunately, it could be argued “ Stephanie’s” previous experiences of system failure, in 2<sup>nd</sup> level education, certainly had an impact on her individual belief systems, behaviours and overall perceptions of Further Education (FE), hence shaping her negative attitude and barriers to motivation of learning.

In addition to delivering subject matter content, practitioners are also expected to ensure learners are familiarised with the Rules and Regulations of the Institution. Following the 2 days lessons, in a 1: 1 session, “ Stephanie” was made aware of the facility to apply for Learner Support, if she felt she had a specific requirement. She produced her psychological report, stating “ *I had come to class armed with it on the first day, but wanted to see if I would fit in with everybody first*” . To further support her progression through the course, additional support sessions for an hour, twice a week before and / or after class were offered, by myself.

Reassurance was given to “ Stephanie” that all strategies and learning experiences would be reflected in her own personal learning style. In addition, Learner Support if approved, would permit an extra 25% additional time to complete all assessments, the support services of a Reader / Scribe would be made available and all papers would be photocopied on yellow paper, to assist with reading. Following the meeting an application was submitted to the organisation for Learner Support.

Micro Level is hugely important in the awareness to issues, context and sometimes problems that Adult learners experience, to develop learner's skills and confidence in their learning with the necessary practices and strategies. Concurrent with Social Justice Ireland, our social role responsibility, as practitioners, leads to the identification of problems and impediments for progression and inclusion, to change and ensure a better, inclusive, nondiscriminatory society for all. *“ Working to build a just society where human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and the environment is respected and protected. ”* (Social Justice Ireland, 2009-2016)

Meso Level is the organisations approaches to ameliorate policies and practices to support and promote inclusion, by facilitating the necessary support apparatuses. It could be argued, the solution to constructed failure, at Meso Level in “ Stephanie's” case at 2nd Level, focussed more on medical treatments, psychological assessments and monetary gain, instead of focussing on the educational solutions and the necessary support apparatuses. Thus, identifying the other so called efforts of “ supported others” as self-centred.

Concurring with Fiona O'Connor suggestions, there is a severe lack of professional training given to practitioners to manage diversity within classrooms. Furthermore, at Meso Level is it more ubiquitous. Many employees at this level have never experienced the importance of emotions and emotional work within classrooms, as their roles and responsibilities are often administrative. (Number Crunching). In line with current paradigms to social inclusivity there is an institutional racism still in existence. At Macro <https://assignbuster.com/concepts-of-social-cohesion-and-equality-in-education/>

Level, the lack of an interview for “ Stephanie” prior to the course commencement, highlighted the failure to identify the necessary prerequisites, willingness to learn, commitment to complete such a long course or that she had an intellectual disability and cognitive condition such as Dyslexia, further demonstrates their lack of concern – they do not want to be bothered. Practitioner’s organise the necessary applications, follow up paper work and hiring of Reader / Scribe personnel for a learner who has been approved for Learner Support. All of which is additional duties outside of class time.

The organisations approach to addressing fostering and inclusion of inequality and diversity by practices could be questionable. Are they adopting a “ bums on seats view”? Should practitioners be pre advised of the physical, mental and intellectual disabilities of learners in advance of course commencement?

Macro Level is the wider structure context of class, gender and race.

Legislative and policy frameworks are regularly being reproduced in the roll out of new revised Strategic Plans, underpinning education, equality and promotion of social inclusion in societal change. However, prior to commencement of the course, “ Stephanie” contacted The Department of Social Protection (DSP) to clarify why she had a place on a course, as she had not applied for one. The information received, informed her she was from a marginalised group, on a Long Term Unemployed Register, therefore it was compulsory to complete a course. This was further outlined in written format, and stated that her failure to attend the course could result in deductions from her Social Welfare Payment. DSP enforcement, can be <https://assignbuster.com/concepts-of-social-cohesion-and-equality-in-education/>



argued as having a negative impact on learners' readiness to learn and a barrier to motivate individuals to partake in learning and progression to Adult and Further Education.

Disability Acts, Equality Acts and legislative Strategic Plans provide opportunities to collaborate together and ensure that all of our citizens are entitled to lifelong learning (LLL) advocating “ *the central pillar of the European Union (EU) strategy, to create a dynamic and competitive knowledge- based society and economy*” (NUI Galway, 2011) . Is this at a cost to the individual? Where is the freedom of choice?

The educational systems in place are clearly strongly integrated into the society. However, in my opinion, it is impossible to expect equality in education in short of progression and advancement towards equality in the social, economic, cultural and political systems. With this in mind, changing education is the catalyst to those revolutions in changing cultural values and opinions.

As previously identified, Marxism removed the focus away from struggling individuals and onto group struggling. It is my belief, fairness and equality for all has still not been achieved and is an ever evolving work in progress, ratifying the only way to effect real change is to do so collectively.

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