

The Construction of Inclusive Culture in General Schools at the Stage of Compulsory Education

Yang Zhang^{1,2,*} Zhenzhou Wang^{1,2}

¹College of the Special Education, Leshan Normal University, Leshan, Sichuan 614000, China

²Institute of Educational Science, Wuhan University, Wuhan, Hubei 430072, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 2019101160002@whu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Taking inclusive schools as an open education system, this paper attempts to analyze the cultural elements of schools that successfully accommodate all types of disabled students and how these cultural elements play their respective roles. This paper mainly adopts the literature method, summarizes and analyzes the more important research results in the past research, and combines the design of China's inclusive education system. It is generally believed that the national system culture, academic orientation and public opinion characteristics constitute the external elements of the inclusive culture of general schools. The inclusive system culture, the culture of inclusive teaching activities, the characteristics of subject consciousness and the culture of physical environment in general schools constitute the internal elements of inclusive culture in general schools.

Keywords: general school, inclusive culture, inclusive education

I. INTRODUCTION

"Inclusive education" was first proposed in "The Salamanca Statement" issued by the World Congress on Special Education in 1994, aiming to state that "every child has the basic right to receive education" [1]. One form of inclusive education in China, learning in regular classes, has existed for a long time. Since 1988, all kinds of disabled children have been widely accepted in general schools in China. With the promulgation of "Special education promotion plan (2014-2016)", "Phase II of special education promotion plan (2017-2020)" and "Guidance on strengthening the work of learning in regular classes in compulsory education for disabled children and adolescents", China's compulsory education for the disabled has gradually formed, with general schools as the main body, special education schools as the backbone, and sending teaching home and distance education as the supplement. In 2019, there are 395000 disabled students in regular classes in China, accounting for 49.15% of the total number of disabled students in education [3]. However, in the mid-term evaluation of the "National medium and long-term education reform and development plan outline" — special education evaluation report pointed out that the main form of special education in China is shrinking and the quality is worrying. The lack of understanding of general school leaders, teachers, students and parents has become the main reason why disabled children are "ignored" and "rejected" in general schools [4] [5] [6], and the "return" of disabled children is still common [7].

Since the reform and opening up, China has issued a series of policies to protect the right of disabled children to receive education through system and legislation, expanding the proportion of inclusive education for disabled children. However, in the process of policy implementation, there has been the derailment. The harmony of culture between system and practice affects the realization of system. On the one hand, culture can promote the development and reform of inclusive education. On the other hand, the inherent traditional culture of general schools also forms a confrontation with the new system, resulting in the incomplete implementation of the system and the formation of institutional dilemma. In Chinese previous literature, the necessary attention was not paid to the cultural influences of successful general schools that accommodate students with all types of disabilities, and how these cultural elements play a role. Therefore, it is urgent to construct an inclusive culture of equality, democracy, acceptance, openness, sharing and inclusiveness, and to improve the service ability of inclusive education.

II. THE CONNOTATION OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE

After more than 20 years of historical evolution, inclusive education in different countries and regions has formed unique inclusive implication and inclusive culture. As early as the 1990s, in the study of inclusive education and school culture in the UK, Jenny Colbert elaborated the inclusive culture model from the

perspective of teachers, namely, educational practitioners. The model includes four aspects: first, teachers listen to and respect views beyond their own experience; second, teachers need to recognize the existence of multiple intelligences not only according to their social and academic status; third, they should pay attention to equal opportunities and face the inequality of social capital; fourth, they should focus on the value of prior teaching [8]. She believed that these conceptual value system models could be used to assess the challenges in inclusive education. Nancy (1999) and others believed that improving inclusive culture of schools can greatly promote the success of inclusive projects. They found three characteristics of school culture related to the success of inclusive projects, including inclusive leadership, broad school vision, and creating inclusive school culture through discussion, sharing language and value [9]. Suzanne et al. (2002) compared Australian schools of inclusive education with traditional cultural schools in three aspects, including the model and role supported by special education teachers, student-centered and content-based culture, beliefs and attitudes about inclusive schools, and teachers' responsibility to meet different learning needs. They pointed out that opportunities for cooperation between teachers and students and the community and more respect in solving problems will contribute to the development of inclusive schools. The values and beliefs embedded in inclusive practice will create a series of new possibilities, expectations, and commitments [10].

The development of inclusive practice in China mainly stems from the promotion of national system. Being subject to the help and restriction of culture, there are still some disabled students who are placed in isolation education, and excluded from the general education system. In recent years, the development of inclusive culture in China has expanded from the internal of inclusive education system to open education system, from the definition of cultural connotation to cultural reconstruction and transformation. With the deepening and differentiation of the research, inclusive education culture is studied from the aspects of school physical environment, school leaders, teachers, and the cooperation among the main bodies. Although different countries and scholars have different views on the definition of inclusive culture, it is undeniable that inclusive culture is the foundation and soil for the generation of inclusive education value. At the same time, inclusive education helps to generate more diversified and inclusive educational cultural phenomena. It is believed that as an open school system, inclusive culture not only includes the inclusive value contained in the educational concept, but also includes the inclusive idea externalized by practice, as well as the inclusive education atmosphere, system and measures formed outside the school.

III. THE CONSTRUCTION OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN GENERAL SCHOOLS

Inclusive culture in education consists of external culture and internal culture. On the one hand, the external culture permeates into the education system. On the other hand, the endogenous culture of the education system continuously spreads to the outside of the education system. Therefore, there are mainly two ways to generate inclusive culture in general schools. One is the inclusive culture outside the education system, which is composed of national system, academic orientation and public opinion. And the other is that the educational system is restricted by the internal inclusive culture, which is mainly composed of school system, teaching activities, subject consciousness and physical environment. Both of them constitute the inclusive cultural ecology of general schools and affect the quality and effect of inclusive education.

A. External inclusive culture of general schools

1) *System culture*: System is the booster of cultural change, with the function of macro guidance. Culture refers to a kind of social communication and social transmission, which is acquired by social members through specific ways. This specific way to obtain common culture is actually the institutional culture through which culture can be exchanged and transmitted [11]. Since the reform and opening up, the cause of the disabled in China has risen. The Communist Party of China and the Chinese government have implemented a series of major measures to develop the cause of the disabled and improve the situation of the disabled [12]. Especially after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, a series of documents, such as the "two-phase promotion plan", "regulations on the education of the disabled", "opinions on strengthening the cultural construction of the disabled", and "notice on the enrollment of compulsory education for disabled children and adolescents", have promoted the practice of inclusive education in general schools, and also focused on the dissemination of the correct concept of disability and the education for the disabled. The modern socialist civilization emphasizes that the culture of the disabled is an important part of socialist culture and a humanistic culture for the construction of socialist spiritual civilization. Due to the guidance and restriction of the system, a perfect system will create a good institutional cultural atmosphere for inclusive education and outline the prospect of equality and sharing.

2) *Academic orientation*: Academic research is the compass of cultural change and the important basis of scientific change. The academic research content of

inclusive education has changed from an initiative to a variety of educational practices. The scope of research has shifted from focusing on the internal education system to focusing on the open external system. The research focus is not only on the problem, but also on the philosophical level, rethinking "what a person is" and "what a disabled person is". The inclusive philosophy of education returns to the thinking of "how to do" in education. For example, the rise of cultural pedagogy and Dilthey's new methodology of human studies make educational epistemology go beyond the purpose-means relationship advocated by Herbart. Education is no longer a synonym for "inculcation", "operation" and "notification", but directly becomes a problem of human self-development and renewal. Its positive significance lies in the integration of education, people and culture, making education an eternal process completed in life [13]. This is in agreement with the "free and comprehensive development of human beings" advocated by Marx in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party", and is consistent with the essential requirement of the Communist Party of China to build the party for the public and to govern for the people. From the perspective of the disabled, the series of articles wrote by Chen Gong and others triggered the questioning of "who I am, who I service for, who service", forming a series of philosophical thinking, and explaining the transformation from the concept of disability in the new era to the culture of the disabled. Therefore, a positive, high-level and deep academic orientation has been formed, providing a brand-new cultural and ideological reference system for inclusive education.

3) *Characteristics of public opinion*: Public opinion is the catalyst of cultural change, with the function of promoting and hindering. When the concepts of "disability" and "equality" in a society change, the basic theory and form of special education will also change [14]. With the rise and rapid development of digital communication and Internet, the dissemination of public opinion presents the characteristics of instantaneity and diversification of supply mode. As an invisible spiritual force, public opinion, as the common psychological tendency of the public, has a great impact on society, groups and individuals. It controls and restricts people's words and deeds, and has an immeasurable moral impact on the transformation of social atmosphere [15]. According to the statistical report on China's Internet development, as of June 2019, the number of Internet users in China has reached 854 million, and the number of mobile Internet users has reached 847 million. The era of "Micro communication" with Weibo and WeChat as the carrier

has arrived in an all-round way [16]. Traditional media and new media vigorously publicize the importance of compulsory education for disabled students, and promote the spread of inclusive education culture, forming a positive public opinion influence. On the other hand, the network fermentation of the event "disabled children's right of education" has triggered the public opinion, and has a negative effect on the society, groups or individuals, promoting the continuous improvement of inclusive education system. Positive public opinion is the catalyst for the growth of inclusive education culture, and also the power source for promoting educational reform, which makes the public form a common identity, that is, the disabled are equal members of the social family, and even more equal members of the human family.

B. Inclusive culture in general schools

1) *Inclusive system culture in schools*: The inclusive system culture in schools is the key to inclusive education, which largely determines whether disabled children can enter the general education system. The inclusive system culture in schools permeates into the school system. The school rules and regulations, work processes, job responsibilities, and student norms all reflect certain value orientation and behavior style. General schools have greater autonomy on the acceptance of disabled children. At present, China has not formed a systematic appeal mechanism and punishment mechanism for general schools refusing disabled children. Therefore, whether general schools have formed an acceptance mechanism depends entirely on the construction of the inclusive system of general schools. On the other hand, the general schools that carry out inclusive education need perfect school inclusive system and mechanism in the exercise of disabled children's right to education, the management of disabled children's school status, the construction of general school resource, the allocation of resource teachers, the special education training for ordinary teachers, the cooperation with itinerant instructors, and the establishment of collaborative relationship between parents and schools with disabilities, so that the quality of inclusive education can be ensured. This kind of cultural construction of school inclusive system helps to improve the service ability of inclusive education, and affects the evaluation and selection of inclusive education by families with disabilities. On the one hand, for the school inclusive system culture, it is required to form the awareness of the rights of the disabled to receive education, and at the same time, it should also form a dialogue mechanism of multiple subjects, so as to promote the education community to reach a

consensus and fulfill the mission of inclusive education in general schools.

2) *Inclusive teaching activity culture*: Teaching is the main melody of school education and the core of inclusive education. The phenomenon of "blended education" in inclusive teaching activities, on the one hand, stems from teachers' wrong understanding of disabled students, regarding "disability" as "disabled"; on the other hand, it is due to teachers' lack of special education knowledge reserve and the lack of necessary professional support, which makes them incompetent for inclusive education. The effective inclusion of teaching activities should change from the acceptance of physical space to the acceptance of disabled students' participation in teaching activities. First of all, teachers' understanding of student subject should be transformed from simply seeking the absolute invariant meaning of objects to understanding the diversity, difference and creative expression of subjects, inspiring individuals to put forward more valuable questions, and deepening the cognition and understanding. Secondly, schools should provide support for ordinary teachers' teaching activities, such as providing teaching assistants for ordinary teachers in teaching, and providing professional guidance for the design of inclusive teaching activities for ordinary teachers. In 2017, General Office of the Ministry of education, General Office of the China Disabled Persons' Federation issued "Notice on the enrollment of disabled children and juveniles in compulsory education": "it is required to implement educational placement in a case by a person, give priority to disabled children and adolescents to receive compulsory education nearby or in designated qualified general schools, and provide professional support for disabled students who need special support in their study and life." However, who provides professional support? How to provide it? What will they offer? Will the schools have the ability to provide it? All of these questions are urgent to be answered in inclusive education. The practice of inclusive education in developed countries, such as Europe and the United States, has proved that the competence of ordinary teachers and the effective support affect whether the culture of teaching activities is accepted or ignored. Therefore, the essential difference between inclusive teaching activities and general education lies in whether teachers can obtain support beyond their own knowledge structure in the process of implementing inclusive education, which is closely related to the success of inclusive teaching activity culture in practice.

3) *The characteristics of subject consciousness*: At the stage of compulsory education, the subjects of inclusive education culture refer to disabled children

who study in general schools. The subject consciousness of inclusive culture mainly refers to the self-awareness of disabled children who study in general schools, which is the consciousness and ability of relationship construction to distinguish self from external objects and others. It is not only the core of dignity, equality and sharing of disabled children, but also the premise of interpersonal interaction. Being affected by the physical and mental characteristics, there is a large individual difference between disabled children and ordinary children. On the one hand, this heterogeneity affects the self-evaluation and self-awareness of disabled children; on the other hand, it also affects the understanding and attitude of others towards disabled children. From the peripheral point of view, if leaders, ordinary teachers, special teachers, ordinary children and parents in general schools hold a positive attitude towards inclusive education, it will help disabled children to have a correct understanding of themselves, and then actively carry out interpersonal interaction in the inclusive environment. From the internal point of view, the continuous improvement of disabled children's self-consciousness will affect their acceptance and affirmation of inclusive education. Therefore, the positive cultural characteristics of subjective consciousness will become the driving force for disabled children to enter the inclusive environment as a minority group.

4) *Physical environment culture*: Physical culture is the condition of inclusive education. Whether the physical culture is restricted everywhere and in the least restrictive environment affects the evaluation and selection of the environment by the subjects of inclusive education. The cultural characteristics of physical environment include the school buildings, facilities, furniture, and the visible culture displayed, hung and attached to the campus. They are not only objective objects, but also the carrier of dialogue with people. They convey a language to people through symbols. Physical environment culture is the "transmission" of human experience. It turns individual psychological process into human spiritual wealth. At the same time, it needs another person's correct interpretation and "translation" to produce new cultural value [13]. Barrier-free environment design is an expression of the concept with least restricted environment advocated by inclusive education. Starting from the experience and feelings of the disabled, on the one hand, it is necessary to eliminate the restrictions of the objective physical environment; on the other hand, it is required to abandon personal psychological exclusion. In March 2012, China issued the "Code for barrier-free design", and the State Council of the

People's Republic of China passed the "Regulations on barrier-free environment construction" in June, promoting the construction and transformation of barrier-free facilities in schools and other public service places. In addition, other school physical design has become the attachment of culture, which should include the inclusive culture. For example, the arrangement of seats, the structure of seats, the form of textbooks, the design of class and school culture walls should reflect the dignity of the disabled.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the process of constructing socialist rule of law, positive culture will become the booster of system implementation, while negative culture will become the resistance of system construction. Entering a new era, people need a new concept of disability and a systematic and positive disability culture [17]. The state has given disabled children the right to receive general education. As an inclusive education institution, general education has the responsibility to create an inclusive cultural atmosphere after the disabled children enter and accept them by action in educational practice. General schools that carry out inclusive education will affect every individual in the education system by constructing a positive inclusive cultural ecology. To make all students become the beneficiaries of education is not only the source of education, but also the ultimate attribution.

References

- [1] Zan Feiyi. The Salamanca Statement on the Principles, Guidelines and Practice of Special Education [J]. Shanghai Educational Science. 1994.11:47-48. (in Chinese)
- [2] Lei Jianghua. Rereading the Salamanca Statement — Analysis on the concept of inclusive education and equal educational opportunities [J]. Modern Special Education. 2001.03:4-6. (in Chinese)
- [3] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. 2019 National Education Development Statistical Bulletin [EB/OL]. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202005/t20200520_456751.html2019-12- 4.
- [4] Zhang Zhenzhen, Lian Fuxin, He Huizhong. A Study on Peer Relationship of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Inclusive Primary School — A Case Study of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province [J]. Chinese Journal of Special Education. 2019.09: 28-34. (in Chinese)
- [5] Wang Lan, Huang Shuai. Investigation on the Status of Learning in Regular Class for Disabled Children in Primary and Middle School of Jilin Province [J]. Modern Education Science. 2018.12:23-26. (in Chinese)
- [6] Zhang Yuexin, Wang Mengmeng, Wang Yan, Li Jingshan. The current situation and reflection of the tour guidance work in regular classes: from the perspective of the tour guidance teacher [J]. Elementary Education. 2019.02: 63-72. (in Chinese)
- [7] Zhang Xin, Zhang Yan, Zhao Bin. Difficulties and Countermeasures for Children with Special Needs Learning in Regular Classes [J]. A Journal of modern special education (Research in Higher Education). 2018.09:14-18. (in Chinese)
- [8] Jenny Corbett. Inclusive education and school culture[J]. International Journal of Inclusive Education. 1999, 1: 53-61.
- [9] Nancy J. Zollers, Arun K. Ramanathan, Moonset Yu. The relationship between school culture and inclusion: how an inclusive culture supports inclusive education[J]. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education. 1999, 2: 157-174.
- [10] Suzanne Carrington, John Elkins. Comparison of a traditional and an inclusive secondary school culture[J]. International Journal of Inclusive Education. 2002, 1: 1-16.
- [11] Zeng Xiaohua. Culture, System and System Culture [J]. Journal of the Zhejiang Provincial Party School of CPC. 2001.02:30-36. (in Chinese)
- [12] The Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Equality, Participation and Sharing: 70 Years of Protection of the Rights and Interests of People with Disabilities in New China. People's Daily. 2019-7-26 No. 017. (in Chinese)
- [13] Zou Jin. Modern German Culture Pedagogy [M]. Taiyuan: Shanxi Education Press, 1992, 06: 21. (in Chinese)
- [14] Deng Meng, Xiao Fei. The Philosophical Basis of Inclusive Education: Criticism and Reflection. Educational Research and Experiment, 2008, 5: 18-23. (in Chinese)
- [15] Chen Chao. Study on the Generalization characteristics and Supply Structure of Public Opinion in the Focus Media Times [J]. Hebei Academic Journal. 2018.1: 175-180. (in Chinese)
- [16] Tang Xiaodi. Let social public opinion "micro-communication" proceed in an orderly manner [J]. People's Tribune. 2017.11: 90-91. (in Chinese)
- [17] Chen Gong. From Disability View to Disability Culture [J]. Disability Research. 2019. 06:03. (in Chinese)