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Understanding Inclusive Education in the “Front of the Class” Movie in Chinese Perspective

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Abstract

To explore the beliefs of Inclusive Education in the film " Front of the class ", this study uses the method of content analysis to interpret and analyze this film from the perspective of the concept of inclusive education, inclusive family, inclusive school, and inclusive society. It found that the film contains rich beliefs and concepts of inclusive education, which helps to pursue quality of education examine educational equity and social equity, provide intellectual support for the construction of inclusive society, responding the UN's sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4) focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Key words: inclusive education; Front of the class; Social equity; Educational equity

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1. Introduction

At the 38th General Conference, UNESCO issued the "Education 2030 Action Framework" and adopted "Incheon Declaration". The mission of education has been expanded towards inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning for all, to provide equal opportunity to everybody. It pointed out that the education development in the next 15 years focuses to improve the education quality and promote

education equity. The education ministry has set up new educational goals based on the overall development framework. The new education agenda focuses on inclusion and equity -- give everyone a fair shot and leave no one behind. All people, regardless of gender, age, race, color, nationality, language, religion, politics, national or social origin, property status, the disabled, immigrants, aborigines, youth and children, especially the vulnerable or marginalized people, should have the opportunity to accept inclusive and equal quality education, and to enjoy lifelong learning. ^[1] The idea of inclusive and equity education advocated in "Education 2030 Action Framework" is embodied in the education movie "Front of the Class". This paper analyzes the idea of inclusive education in the movie to help realize equal quality education and promote the development of inclusive education.

The American movie "Front of the Class" is based on a true story. It tells the story of the hero Bradley Cohen, who has Tourette Syndrome at 6 years old. He often twitches or makes strange noises in his life. This disease has brought him a lot of pain since childhood. The classmates and teachers did not understand and even laughed at him, even his father could not accept him from the bottom of his heart. With the loving help and encouragement of his mother, Cohen never gave up on himself and tried hard to overcome Tourette. After countless hardships and setbacks, he finally realized his dream of being a teacher and found his life partner. In the movie "Front of the Class", the idea of inclusive education is reflected at various stages of Cohen's growth. When we watch the movie from the perspective of inclusive education, we'll get some new inspirations.

2. Inclusive Education

To implement "Education 2030", we need to practice inclusive education. "An important task of our time is to search a fundamental, non-discriminatory model" ^[2]. The idea of inclusive education is a non-discriminatory model. Inclusive education is a new educational concept and process proposed in Salamanca Statement in Spain in 1994. It includes all students, opposes exclusion and discrimination, cares, and meets the diverse needs of students.

UNESCO defines inclusive education as a process of reducing exclusion within and outside the education system by increasing learning, cultural and community participation, focusing on and meeting the diverse needs of all learners. Inclusive education covers all school-age children and believes that the formal system is responsible for educating all children. It involves the reform and adjustment of educational content, educational approach, educational structure and educational strategy. Inclusion involves responding appropriately to diverse learning needs in formal and informal educational settings. Inclusive education is not a minor matter of how to include some students into the mainstream. It is a method of how to reform education system and other learning environments in order to accommodate the diversity of learners. The aim is to make the teachers and students to accept diversity as an opportunity, as well as an enrichment of the learning environment, rather than a problem. ^[3] Therefore, inclusive education focuses on and meets the different needs of students, cares for all people including marginalized and discriminated groups, opposes exclusion and discrimination, pursues true fairness and justice, and advocates that we should build a harmonious and democratic inclusive society.

3. Understanding the belief of inclusive education in the movie of Front of the class

The core of inclusive education is to realize educational equity, and the first meaning of "inclusive" is acceptance. Huang Zhicheng, a Chinese scholar, points out that "acceptance" expresses that the school should accept all people, against its antonym "exclusion", that is, to "accept all people, not exclude anyone". According to the concept of inclusive education, it is not simply to include all people but more importantly, how to treat them. Inclusive education advocates encouraging all students to participate in school study and life, mainly by means of collective cooperation and mutual help. ^[4]

At the beginning of the movie, the hero Bradley Cohen said that his classmates called him "spaz", "freak" etc. He had no friends, but a constant "companion": "Tourette Syndrome". The patients with this disease made twitching acts and strange noises. Since childhood, Bradley Cohen did not like going to school, because his twitches and noises were criticized by the teachers. As we can see, Cohen was discriminated and excluded by others in the process of his growth. Friendly classmates and beautiful campus in normal eyes made him feel unwelcome. Cohen could not participate in study and life at school, let alone cooperate with his classmates in class. From the perspective of inclusive education, this is very unfair to Cohen.

3.1 Inclusive education in family

Family is a vital part to each one of us. Parents are the most intimate people in our lifetime. Parents' attitudes, behaviors and habits have an important impact on children. Peng Yan points out that for every special child, only when he/she is fully accepted by his/her family that the family means

something to him/her. If the parents want their children to be accepted by school and society, acceptance from family must be the starting point. ^[5] Therefore, schools and society will not accept children until their family accepts them. Acceptance from family is a great inner strength for children. When the inner strength is sufficient, the children will have the confidence to accept everything external.

In the movie, Cohen's relationship with his father goes from denial to acceptance. Before it was made clear that Cohen's strange behaviors were caused by Tourette Syndrome, his father did not try to understand and accept him, but thought that Cohen behaved this way deliberately, naughty, and mischievous on purpose. Cohen's father could not understand him but thought his behaviors were intolerable. In the concept of inclusive education, acceptance from family is the starting point of inclusive education. So, father's rejection has a huge negative impact on Cohen's growth. As a father, he should learn to accept everything about Cohen, both good and bad. Only the real acceptance of Cohen can help him to be accepted by the school and society.

In the movie, Cohen's mother accepted him all the time. His mother always loved Cohen deeply. When faced with all external stress, she never gave up on Cohen but believed in him. When the school kicked him out, his mother still believed in him. She searched through the data and discovered that Cohen's behaviors were caused by Tourette Syndrome. She helped Cohen to integrate into normal society. After Cohen failed to find a job again and again, his mother always encouraged him, cared for him, and believed in him. This unconditional and inclusive love is just the practice of inclusive education in family. The inclusive education from his mother gave Cohen confidence to face the unfairness in life. No matter what frustrations he encountered in life, he would face them with a smile.

3.2 Inclusive education in schools

In 1994, the "Salamanca Statement" defined inclusive school as: "An inclusive school is able to recognize and respond to the diverse needs of students, adapt to the different learning styles and paces through appropriate curriculum, organization, teaching strategies, resources application and cooperation with the community to ensure that all students have access to quality education." ^[6] In the movie, Cohen met principal Mayer when he was a kid. The principal created an opportunity for him to go on stage, where Cohen explained his Tourette Syndrome and asked people not to look at him with weird eyes and not to single him out the students applauded after listening to his explanation. Cohen was encouraged and supported by the whole school, and he felt different warmth. This means that he was sincerely accepted by his teachers and classmates. This transformation opened a door to a new world for Cohen. This school is a practitioner of inclusive school, and it builds an inclusive school. The principal respected, understood and accepted Cohen's individual differences, and proposed that all teachers and students should tolerate Cohen's differences. It created a good environment for Cohen's development and provided a good reference for the implementation of inclusive education.

Inclusive education believes that all children and youngsters, regardless of social-cultural background, should have equal opportunity to participate in school education. Therefore, schools should create an inclusive environment, including an atmosphere of respect, understanding and acceptance of different individuals; teachers should take corresponding measures to meet students' different expectations and needs so that every student can receive quality education. ^[7] Therefore, inclusive education-oriented schools should oppose discrimination and exclusion. Cohen interviewed at 25 schools in the United States, but the principals rejected him because of his Tourette Syndrome, no matter how excellent his resume and teaching experience were. Although the principals of these schools knew the Americans with Disabilities Act that Cohen was entitled to such a job opportunity, they refused Cohen to become a teacher. This is a discrimination and exclusion against Cohen. These schools violated the concept of inclusive education. Until Cohen came to Mountain View Primary School, the principal accepted Cohen and said, "If we are gonna talk the talk, we need to walk the walk." It means that schools and teachers should lead by example. This shows that if you educate the students that they should never allow anything get in the way of their life, the educators must learn to tolerate and accept everything. The Mountain View Primary School implemented the idea of inclusive education and accepted Cohen in order to create an inclusive campus.

Inclusive education focuses on the different needs of all students. Inclusive education appreciates diversity, not only right of education, but also quality education to develop the potential of everyone. Inclusive education should fully consider the individual needs of the students, provide diversified forms of education, focus on the individuation of joint learning experience, and promote the maximum participation of all students. ^[7] After Cohen became a primary school teacher, he taught the students to be themselves and he put up the words "It's okay to be different" in the classroom. This shows that Cohen is a teacher who appreciates diversity very much. Thomson, one of Cohen's students, had attention deficit disorder and Hyperactivity Disorder. Other teachers suggested that the student should

be transferred to special class, while Cohen insisted on keeping him in his class. He sought every opportunity to praise and educate him, and to influence him with his own experience. Because Cohen upheld inclusive education in his teaching, he won the love of students, parents, and the school.

3.3 Inclusive education in society

From the perspective of space, inclusive education is not only concerned about education, but also covers the whole society. Educational equity is the core of inclusive education. However, to promote the development of inclusive education, we need to push forward social equity. The biggest difficulties that the disabled are faced with result from the society rather than directly from their disability. Society should not simply sympathize with those with physical or mental disabilities, but have the responsibility to give them freedom and to guarantee their rights.^[8] The future society should be an inclusive society, because the major pursuit of an inclusive society is social justice, equal opportunity, and democratic participation. In the movie, when Cohen and his brother went to play golf, Cohen was asked to leave the course because of the strange noise made by his Tourette Symptom, which was essentially a kind of exclusion. When Cohen took graduate exams, he had the right to ask for a single room to take the exams, but the school's first reaction was to reject him. A scene in the movie that should pay our most attention is when Cohen was a child, many Tourette sufferers united to help each other. However, instead of mutual help, they spoke out the injustices they had encountered in the society. Although Americans with Disabilities Act gives them the right to do whatever they want and go wherever they want. In real life, however, they have been excluded from public places and confined to their homes. They can't go to school, nor entertainment but excluded by everyone and discriminated by society. Social inequities in the movie are displayed in many scenarios, and there are many social inequities in real life too. Such a society is so unfair. Inclusive education guides us to build an inclusive society. The core of inclusive society is social fairness. Therefore, what we need to do is to recognize these inequities, then solve them, and pursue quality fairness.

4. Conclusion

At the end of the movie, Cohen was accepted by his father, school, and society. Cohen was honored as "Teacher of the Year", which proves the impact of inclusive education. "Front of the Class" is an American educational movie. Selecting the subject matter in real life, it is a realistic movie. From the movie, we can see that there are still some problems in implementing inclusive education. However, the overall trend is very good. Whether in family, school or society, the concept of inclusive education has become more and more accessible. It is the characters' adherence to inclusive education that makes the movie warm so that people will examine the issues of educational fairness and social equity. Therefore, as a popular art form, movies must bring people warmth and hope when facing contradictions and even darkness from real life, and ignite people's inner kindness with the light of humanity and justice. We should emphasize realism's humanistic concern for the lower classes, because only in this way can it change the reality and drive social progress.^[9]

Inclusive education in China has been developing and has achieved remarkable achievements. In 2008, Chinese state councilor Liu Yandong pointed out at the 48th International Education Conference with the theme of "Inclusive Education: the Road to Future" that our ideal is to make every child enjoy equal rights and opportunities of education, perfect themselves with knowledge, create a wonderful life, let the light of human civilization illuminate all people in the future.^[10] The policies in recent years have witnessed that inclusive education in China is developing towards quality education.

In January 2014, China "Special Education Promotion Plan (2014-2016)" set the overall goal of "comprehensively promoting inclusive education so that every disabled child can enjoy appropriate education". In August 2016, the State Council of China issued "Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for Accelerating the Well-off Process for People with Disabilities", which stipulated: to carry out integrated education, establish support system of learning in regular class, set up special education resources classroom in the schools with more disabled students, improve the ability of ordinary schools to receive disabled students, expand the scale of integrated education, rely on the existing special education schools, strengthen guidance and support of normal school to implement integrated education. "Regulations on Education for People with Disabilities" revised by the Chinese government in 2017 proposed that "promote integrated education", "priority to ordinary education", and "disabled children and adolescents of appropriate age who are able to adapt to life and study in ordinary schools and able to receive ordinary education should enroll in nearby ordinary schools to receive compulsory education".^[11] In July 2017, "the Second Phase of Special Education Promotion Plan (2017-2020)" pointed out that integrated education should be promoted in an all-round way, with learning in regular schools as the main body, special education schools as the backbone, and teaching at home and distance education as the supplement. In January 2022, China issued the "14th Five-year Plan of Action

for the Development and Improvement of Special Education". It emphasizes "promoting equity and realizing sharing so that every child and youngster with disabilities will have the chance to excel; we should respect differences and integrate diversity so that children with disabilities and ordinary children can grow and progress together."

Therefore, development of inclusive education is not just a concept, but a sustainable practice under specific policies. While practicing inclusive education, we must improve the quality of education and pursue quality education with equity. "To improve the quality of education, we should focus on solving the problem of fairness, including the unfair distribution of educational resources among schools, differences in educational quality among schools and regions, and differences in learning results of different groups such as different genders or social classes."^[12] Only by improving the quality of education and educational equity can we meet the requirements for social equity. For future education, we need to pursue quality education with equity. The future society will definitely be an inclusive society.

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