


Inclusion is Not Assimilation: The Importance of Identity in Education

By Dr. Shelley Moore, Jan. 2025

Inclusion in education has changed a lot over time. It's no longer just about having everyone in the same classroom; it's about making sure everyone feels like they belong and that their identities are recognized. Dr. Shelley Moore, in her "Five Moore Minutes" video, points out that inclusion shouldn't mean forcing people to fit into a dominant group. Instead, it should create spaces where different identities can live together and succeed. Research supports this idea, showing that recognizing and valuing the diverse identities of students helps them do better socially and academically.

One example shared by Dr. Moore is about a young refugee student who felt lost when he first arrived in Canada. He started to feel like he belonged when he met another student who spoke his language and shared his culture. This shows how important it is for students to connect with others who have similar backgrounds. Studies show that when students form these connections, they gain social support and resilience, which help them adjust and succeed in school. Being able to speak one's home language is not just a preference; it's a crucial part of identity that affects how students feel about belonging and their emotional health.

Dr. Moore also emphasizes that inclusion shouldn't require people to hide who they are or fit into mainstream norms. Research indicates that when students feel pressured to assimilate, they can feel alienated and exhausted, which harms their academic performance and mental health. For example, LGBTQ2+ students often face challenges in environments that don't recognize their identities, leading to anxiety and lower grades. Therefore, creating an inclusive environment means allowing all students to express their identities openly without fear of judgment or exclusion, including students with Disabilities.



Disability is an important part of this discussion. The understanding of Disability has shifted from a medical viewpoint to a social one, which values identity and community among people with Disabilities. Researchers argue for redefining Disability in ways that promote appreciation and belonging among both Disabled and non-disabled individuals. This perspective helps to reduce isolation and emphasizes the importance of social relationships.

Developing a positive Disability identity is also crucial for students with Disabilities. Many students lack positive representation and resources during their early years, which can hinder their understanding of their identity until adulthood. This highlights the need for schools to offer resources and support to help students with Disabilities explore and affirm their identities from a young age. Additionally, Disability should be seen as part of social justice efforts, alongside other identity and diversity driven initiatives, to create inclusive environments that respect and celebrate all identities.

As we work towards inclusive education, it's vital to understand that true inclusion means celebrating diversity and building communities where everyone feels safe and valued. This means supporting students in embracing their identities and ensuring that all members of the school community, including students with Disabilities, feel respected. By focusing on inclusion rather than assimilation, we can create educational spaces where everyone can thrive, enriching the learning experience for all. Inclusion is about creating environments where students can be their true selves, which is especially important for those with Disabilities, who often face challenges in feeling like they belong. By promoting positive Disability identities and fostering communities of identity, educators can help all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to learn from one another.



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