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The Current State of Inclusive Education: Contradictions and Concerns

Chapter overview

Observing the current state of inclusive education, it appears that the social justice underpinnings of inclusive education have failed for the most part to be translated into effective policies and practices. While educational systems continue to struggle to manage diverse student populations, inclusive education tends to be reduced to a new name for 'special education'. Even in cases where inclusive education is perceived as an opportunity for change, assumptions about normality and the normalization role of schools are not questioned and challenged.

Has inclusion turned into a 'soft' approach to dealing with populations that are increasingly perceived in terms of medical categories?

Is this conception of inclusion another way of reinforcing the dominance of the medical model of disability?

In this chapter we argue that the great expectations of the early 1990s have been replaced by a lack of critical engagement with the realities of education and schools. There is a theoretical vacuum reflected in the escapism of much of the postmodern writings on inclusion or in the pragmatic watering-down of the underlying idealism of inclusion.

In the previous chapter we outlined a number of issues that we consider central in understanding the development of inclusive education. Here we explore the complexities involved in understanding the significance of inclusive education and its implications for the current state of the field. These complexities can be considered under four broad headings.

- The complex diverse origins of the inclusive education movement.

- The problem of definition.

- The different modes of realization of inclusive education in policy and practice.

- The outcomes of inclusion.

The origins of inclusion

The early calls for inclusion in the mid-1980s and early 1990s emanated from different groups with different experiences. However, together they presented a powerful critique of existing and emerging issues in education. There were four different strands to this critique.

Parents, teachers and advocates of students with disabilities promoted inclusion as a way of challenging the restrictions to *access* and *participation* imposed by existing models of 'mainstreaming' or 'integration'. This critique disputed three main assumptions of existing policy and practice. First, that there is a threshold to the level of education that some students are able to access due to the type and/or severity of their disability. Second, that in order to meet effectively the distinct needs of students identified as having special education needs and disabilities, there must be a complex system of identification and assessment based on the attributes or behaviour of the individual child. Third, that special forms of provision for instruction are required, frequently necessitating removal of the child with special educational needs from the regular classroom for a substantial part of their school life. This critique was developed mainly in contexts where mainstreaming and integration were already established, such as in Northern America, England, Australia and New Zealand.

The development of social definitions of disability by disabled and non-disabled activists and theorists influenced the critique of the role of education, and special education in particular, in reproducing the exclusion and oppression of disabled people (Oliver, 1996). The *Social Model* of disability influenced relevant discussions and debates in inclusive education. According to the Social Model a person's impairment is not the cause of disability, but rather disability is the result of the way society is organized, which disadvantages and excludes people with impairments. It follows from this that the focus should not be on the person with an impairment and how they can be made to 'fit' into schools (individual model of disability), but rather on removing any barriers within schools that disable the person with an impairment. The discussions and debates within Disabilities Studies about the relation of impairment and disability also have implications for inclusive education, and its influence on thinking about inclusive education has been considerable.

Advocates of inclusive education mounted a challenge to the education reform programmes that were taking place in a number of countries and which introduced market-driven arrangements in schools, promoting specific notions of accountability, control, choice and diversity. Central to this discussion is the examination of how difference is managed within educational systems through the identification and labelling of individuals and groups, and through the interrelated processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Calls for inclusive education have become a significant feature of programmes for educational change in developing countries. While the work of international organizations has been instrumental in constructing inclusion as an international aim, we argue in this book that there has been little two-way exchange between the countries of the South and the North.

It can be argued that the power of inclusion as a critical project lies to its extensive focus. Inclusion generated a critique of special education that moved beyond a simple dichotomy of mainstream and special education. Although the practices and effectiveness of special education have been criticized, the main focus of critique has been on the purpose of special education as a separated but interlinked sub-system of education. Tomlinson (1982) demonstrated the ways that special education works to control the smooth working of general education, which is unable or unwilling to educate a significant minority of the school population. However, as we discussed in the previous chapter, the underpinning of this critique is based on specific values about education and the society that it serves. As Barton (1995: 157) argues, 'special education entails a discourse of exclusion and this is seen as a particularly offensive aspect of such provision'. Thus a values perspective that promotes social justice and equal participation in education and society cannot provide a justification for special education.

Even though special education needs are usually located on the perimeter of education, it is at this boundary where 'normality' in educational terms is defined. It is questionable that the inclusive education movement has really redefined what is viewed to be 'normal' but it has been successful in challenging the boundaries. For example, increasingly mainstream teachers are required (for example, by special education needs and disability legislation, their preparation courses, and teachers' accreditation bodies) to have the skills that will enable them to meet the diverse needs of their students, including students with disabilities and special education needs. Locating the inclusion debate within the general education context has been a substantial development in the past 20 years or so in many countries and cause for celebration for many students, their families and those who advocate for inclusion. However, the resistance of schools and teachers to embracing inclusion, the reasons informing this resistance, and the continuing perceptions of some groups of students as 'problems to be managed' remain causes for concern.

Defining inclusion

As inclusion gained currency in theoretical debates and policy programmes, the broad terms of 'inclusion', 'educational inclusion' and 'inclusive education' have accommodated diverse meanings. It is a common adage that *'inclusion means different things to different people'.* The difficulty of providing a definition of inclusion that describes inclusion in a positive way (that is, in terms of what it is rather than what it is not) is partly due to the complexity of its origins. For example, it is very common to find statements of the type: 'inclusion is not simply a different word for special education' or 'inclusion is not only about disabled students or students with special education needs'. Such statements can be represented as 'negative' definitions of inclusion, but in saying what it is not, no indication is given by these statements about what would actually change with the introduction of inclusive education. Some writers propose that it is preferable to talk about *inclusions* in the plural (Dyson, 1999) but this really avoids the issue by merely stating the obvious; namely, that the term is used in many different ways to mean different things.

Ironically, in the absence of any clarity about its meaning the rhetoric of inclusion in educational policy and practice has become ever more pronounced. An ever-expanding literature on the implementation of inclusive strategies and practices in the classroom has perhaps been the most concrete outcome of the inclusion movement. Important as these are, they hardly fulfil the promise of the inclusion movement for making significant systems-level change.

The reality is not simply that inclusion means different things to different people, but rather that inclusion may end up meaning everything and nothing at the same time. We have suggested that in its origins the argument for inclusion provided a powerful critique of educational systems and current practice. In particular this critique emphasized the potential role of schooling in creating inclusive and democratic societies. Yet, in practice, this powerful insight has been largely diluted as it has struggled to spell out a clear set of principles and practices in the face of a rhetoric of convenience which embraces the 'feel-good' aspects of the inclusive discourse without serious engagement with the issues that it exposes in respect of the purposes and values of educational practice.

Ainscow et al. (2006) attempt to address this problem by distinguishing two types of definitions. According to them there are 'descriptive' definitions of inclusion, which specify the variety of ways 'inclusion' is used in practice. But there are also 'prescriptive' definitions, which indicate the way we intend to use the concept and would like it to be used by others. However, this distinction is not entirely clear since how inclusion is used in practice is not independent of how, for example, policy definitions prescribe inclusion. More useful for our discussion may be another distinction that Ainscow et al. (2006) make between 'narrow' and 'broad' definitions of inclusion. Narrow

definitions of inclusion refer to the promotion of the inclusion of specific group of students, mainly but not exclusively disabled students and/or students with special education needs in 'mainstream' or 'regular' education. 'Broad' definitions of inclusion, on the other hand, do not focus on specific groups of students, but rather on diversity and how schools respond to the diversity of *all* students and every other member of the school community. We would also add another dimension to this distinction, which we can call 'fragmented' definitions. Both narrow and broad definitions can be fragmented when they break down the group that they refer to. This way of distinguishing definitions of inclusion can be helpful when looking at what exactly is being proposed by policy documents. For example, in the UK the Office for Standards in Education's *Guidance for Evaluating Educational Inclusion* (Ofsted, 2000: 7, emphasis added) states that:

> An *educationally inclusive school* is one in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and well-being of every young person matter […] This does not mean treating all pupils in the same way. Rather it involves taking account of pupils' varied life experiences and needs. […] They identify any pupils who may be missing out, difficult to engage, or feeling in some way to be apart from what the school seeks to provide.

In the same report the following groups of students are identified in relation to inclusion: girls and boys; minority ethnic and faith groups, Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees; pupils who need support to learn English as an additional language (EAL); pupils with special educational needs; gifted and talented pupils; children 'looked after' by the local authority; other children, such as sick children, young carers; children from other families under stress; pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers; and any pupils who are at risk of disaffection and exclusion. This list 'fragments' the notion of young people into numerous groups and, consequently, inclusion becomes a process of 'managing' many different individuals and groups who are perceived as 'problems'.

It is clearly not sufficient to select a 'good' definition of inclusion (that is, a definition that one agrees with) and ignore all others. Simply selecting a definition does not confine either the theorization or practice of inclusive education to that definition; nor does it eliminate the complexities and contradictions that characterize much of the thinking about what is meant by 'inclusion'. Definitions focusing on different levels of policy and practice are commonly found. As we have seen, much of the commentary on inclusion is concerned with the identification and advocacy of 'good' classroom practice. Yet, inclusion may also be seen either as an education reform programme that ultimately aims at the restructuring of educational systems or as a policy/practice issue within the current structures of education systems. These different considerations are frequently absent from discussions of inclusion, yet we would argue that even in positioning a discussion about inclusion there are necessary interconnections to be considered that require critical engagement

with a broader range of issues about the social and economic purposes of education and the nature and meaning of citizenship.

Summing up the above points, we can argue that different understandings of inclusion generate different possible answers to the three parts of the question: '*inclusion for whom, into what and for what purpose?*' In turn, depending on the answer to this question different conceptions of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' are generated.

🗁 Case study

Different responses to the question *inclusion for whom, into what and for what purpose?*

First response: Inclusion is about all students with disabilities participating in all aspects of the school life within the regular school to provide them access to the same educational experiences with other students and full citizenship in an inclusive society.
Second response: Inclusion refers to students with disabilities and special education needs and their increased participation within the education system with the aim to provide an education that responds to their individual needs and to prepare them for life after school.
Third response: Inclusion refers to all students actively participating in schools that are organized in such ways that all students are valued and which constantly problematize notions of inclusion and exclusion and of different ways of being.

Looking at these three definitions it becomes evident that they propose different pathways for how inclusion can be achieved. Although the first two definitions are 'narrow' in terms of the group of students they refer to, their implications for an educational system and its functioning are substantially different. The first definition proposes an inclusion project that requires fundamental changes to the educational system in terms of values, attitudes, structure and organization, curriculum arrangements, criteria of achievement, and so on. Implicit in such a definition may be the assumption that schools (and education systems) that are inclusive in this way would respond not only to disabled students but also to other groups of students who experience exclusion and therefore the inclusion of disabled students is part of a more general programme of education reform.

The second definition is also 'narrow' in terms of referring to specific groups of students and it presents an inclusion project that does not require a radical restructuring of existing provisions, policy and practices. Similar definitions of inclusion can be found in many education policy

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documents. In addition, in research on teachers' attitudes to inclusion this type of definition is commonly presented as the one teachers tend to agree with. Many writers in the area of inclusive education are critical of this type of definition, which they see as defining integration as inclusion.

The third definition of inclusion is 'broad' and refers to all students. It presents inclusion as an open-ended project where difference is central to negotiating and constructing individual identities. Inclusion and exclusion are not seen as static, but rather in constant interaction. This understanding of inclusion does not present a finite point for the project of inclusion but any outcome will be the result of significant changes in schools.

Realizing inclusion

Depending on the answer to the question '*inclusion for whom, into what and for what purpose*?', a different answer is given also to the questions '*how can inclusion be achieved?*' and '*what constitutes inclusive practice?*' The *realization of inclusion* constitutes the third complexity that we are going to discuss. In the discussion that follows we consider the outcomes of the inclusive project from five different perspectives on the meaning of inclusion.

From a perspective on inclusion that understands it in terms of a continuum of provision there may remain acceptance of placements in special schools, special units and special classes, on the basis of balancing different rights. Thus, the right of participation is given to some groups with the proviso that the rights of other groups (and especially of the 'majority') are not affected. As Smith (1998: 164) argues, 'some of the rhetoric associated with inclusion concerning "rights of the individual" has been construed by some professionals as "incompatible with the common good"'. This 'common good' is safeguarded by 'clauses of conditionality' (Slee, 1996) to the right of participation when the 'appropriateness' of participation is contested. The limitations on participation frame special education (special school, unit or class) as a mechanism for advancing the goal of inclusion. The transition to inclusion is guided by the balancing of rights and therefore those who have been excluded from the mainstream earning the right to return in so far as they cause no harm to the rights of the majority within the mainstream.

An organizational approach to schooling sees schools as organizations that have the potential to instigate and implement change in becoming more inclusive. In this approach inclusion is seen as a process. For example Black-Hawkins et al. (2007: 8) argue that 'inclusion in education is both the means for, and a consequence of, school systems attempting to address issues of

inequality by widening access and participation'. They conceptualize inclusive schools as those that both serve a diverse student population and constantly seek to improve the achievements of all their students. However, some of the discussion of the arrangements described in the case studies they present, for example the participation in the school life of students attending the separate 'resourced provision' for students designated as having profound and multiple learning difficulties in one school, have close similarities with what the *Warnock Report* (DES, 1978) referred to as 'locational' integration; there remains a physical separation between the mainstream and special unit even though they are located on the same site.

The work of Ainscow, Booth and Dyson has been very influential internationally through the implementation in schools in many countries of the *Index for Inclusion* (Ainscow et al., 2006). They take a 'principled approach' to education through the articulation of a number of inclusive values including 'equity', 'participation', 'community', 'compassion', 'respect for diversity', 'sustainability' and 'entitlement'. Yet, they argue that the barriers that inhibit participation and learning and which prevent the allocation of resources to support that participation and learning can only be meaningfully specified and overcome within a particular school. According to their approach, an inclusive school is one that is prepared to engage with change rather than one that has reached a perfect state. For writers working with what we can call a 'pragmatic' framework for the realization of inclusion, the balancing of what is 'achievable' at a given time in a given setting with what is ultimately 'desirable' is a constant issue of consideration.

Other approaches to inclusion emphasise inclusion as a political struggle. Leo and Barton (2006) argue that commitment to inclusion is difficult to sustain in the current policy context and that for schools within the most disadvantaged communities, where 'special needs' are most frequently found, the challenges are even greater. Their discussion emphasizes the limits of school leadership and school development for achieving inclusive practice within the structural constraints in which schools operate. In particular, they refrain from presenting a model for schools to follow, but rather highlight the principles of inclusive leadership proposing that central to leadership for inclusion is 'moral leadership' which acknowledges the 'moral values of social inclusion'.

Finally, Allan (2008) uses concepts developed by the philosophers of difference to examine the idea of inclusion, an idea she perceives as political. In particular she uses the concepts of 'subverting', 'subtracting' and 'inventing' to explore possible ways of action for those engaging in inclusion and thus inclusion becomes reframed as a struggle for participation rather than something that is done to young people. Thus, the idea of inclusion is a continuous struggle, not a fixed outcome. Moreover, in conceptualizing inclusion in

this way, teachers can avoid a sense of frustration or guilt over their apparent failures because they too are involved in a continuous and contested process rather than with the implementation of a predetermined goal.

The central similarity of all these examples is that they are working within the constraints of the existing educational systems. However, in most of them, participants in the process of becoming more inclusive need to address issues at different levels of the school system. They need to see how staff and students are organized; resources and support systems are utilized; curriculum is developed, presented and assessed; attitudes of the school communities influence understanding, interactions and opportunities for collaboration; and how change can be initiated and what kind of professional development is needed. All these happen while the school is still undertaking numerous statutory processes concerning the identification and assessment of needs, as well as seeking additional resources to meet a range of diverse needs. Thus the school needs to operate within a framework that for students with special educational needs in many educational systems is orientated towards an individual model of dis/ability and need, and at the same time to transcend this model in the process of becoming inclusive.

Thus, even though some schools may be very effective in 'managing' the above processes and in providing at the same time inclusive experiences to their students, this (a) may have no or limited effect in relation to other schools and their practices, (b) probably has no effect at the system level in terms of further change towards a more inclusive system, and (c) may be a precarious process which may fail to be sustained in the long term. As we discuss in Chapter 8, 'inclusive practice' takes place in many schools and classrooms. However, whether this means that schools are becoming more inclusive is questionable.

Outcomes of inclusion

The above discussion leads us to consider a fourth area of complexity in respect of the meaning of inclusion; namely, that of the *outcomes of inclusion*. Since there is no clear agreement about what inclusion is and how it might be realized, it is also difficult to establish consensus about what the outcomes of inclusion should be. There are two aspects to this, *what are the outcomes of inclusion* and *how can they be demonstrated and measured*? Depending on which definition of inclusion one uses, different outcomes and measures may be seen as relevant.

For example, for definitions that perceive the process of inclusion as an alternative to special education provision, a possible measure may be that inclusion

provides better short- and long-term educational and social outcomes to students with special education needs than separate systems of special education provision. One central difficulty with the research in this area is that there are methodological and ethical issues involved creating difficulties for the design of studies that compare the same or similar things. Thus, most of these studies are small scale, with small samples and without 'control' groups. Such studies respond more to the question of whether a particular instance of placement is 'effective' for a particular group of students in a particular educational context, rather than to that of whether a particular approach to educating students is effective. This places significant limitations on the 'evidence base' which might demonstrate whether or not the outcomes of inclusion are successful in educational terms.

For definitions that do not see any connection or continuity between special education provision and inclusion, the above measure may also be inappropriate. It may be better to utilize student measures (for example, engagement with learning, achievement, participation of the student population), teacher measures (for example, attitudes, workload, sense of preparedness) and school-level measures (for example, enrolment practices, staff retention, grouping of students, methods of instructions). Numerous studies taking a case study approach exist that explore how inclusion is defined and implemented in specific educational settings or across educational settings.

It can be argued that the more encompassing the definition of inclusion, the more difficult it is to measure it. In the second definition of inclusion detailed above, which focuses on the increased participation of students with special education needs, outcomes (and relevant measures) of inclusion can be set for this specific group of students. However, in a definition like the third one we have described, which looks at inclusion for all students (and perhaps other members of the school community, including teachers), the 'outcomes of inclusion' cannot be separated from broader educational outcomes in any meaningful way. Moreover, as we have previously indicated, not everything that is called and presented as 'inclusive' may actually be experienced as inclusive, precisely because different understandings of inclusion are employed. It is obviously problematic to use 'evidence' about the effectiveness or not of inclusion drawn from one definition to evaluate the outcomes from a different perspective.

Thomas et al. (1998:5–6) argue that 'If principles cannot be evaluated for their veracity nor ethics for their truth, it is crucial that the consequences of the principled policy decision to provide inclusive education are rigorously monitored'. Without denying that it is essential at many levels to examine the 'effectiveness' of inclusion in its implementation, it is perhaps more crucial to unpack whether and to what extent inclusion challenges the weighting of 'costs' and 'benefits' in terms of individual, group and society 'needs' and 'good'.

〰️ Points for reflection

Consider what 'benefits' and 'costs' are involved in the pairs of state-ments below and how they are weighted against each other:

- Peter's disability is such that he won't benefit from a placement in the regular classroom.
- Maya's disability is such that her inclusion in the regular classroom would have a negative effect on the smooth working of the classroom.

- This school is not ready to accept students with disabilities because the necessary resources are not available.
- This school has an academic orientation and, due to her disability, Karla does not fit the school's student profile.

- Teachers do not possess the necessary knowledge to effectively teach students with disabilities.
- It is not part of the role of general classroom teachers to teach students with disabilities.

- Society is not ready at the moment to accept students with disabilities as equal members.
- Students with disabilities will have an adverse effect to other students' well-being.

- Substantial financial investment is needed before inclusion can be implemented in schools.
- Many students without disabilities need further assistance and addi-tional resources in regular schools and it is not fair to invest all these resources on a small group of students.

Critiques of inclusion

In this final section we turn our attention to critique of the inclusion proj-ect in order to outline issues that we believe inclusive education still needs to address if it is to continue to hold claims to being a credible project or goal. Inclusive education has been criticized from different perspectives as being *flawed in its conceptualization*. Such criticisms have come from the advocates of more traditional approaches to special education as well as from within the inclusive education movement itself. Finally, perhaps the most powerful critique has been mounted from within the disability movement from those groups, such as the Deaf, who reject the premise upon which inclusive education has been founded by its advocates in the disability movement.

For a number of writers, special education, as a 'separate' or 'sub-system' component of education is inescapable. Bateman (1995) for example, argues that special education is a direct consequence of the bell-shaped distribution of many human learning characteristics. Mainstream education, Bateman argues, is a system that by its very essence is centred on the average needs and abilities of the school population. Even if it were possible to individualize the delivery of education within the mainstream classroom so that all needs were engaged with, such an approach would remain less than optimally effective in terms of learning outcomes and particularly inappropriate for the students at the extremes, the outliers. On this argument, special education provides a 'safety net' for 'regular education' as well as a specialized service for the disabled child. Accordingly, it follows that inclusive education is a 'folly' that does a disservice not only to students with disabilities, but also to other students, teachers and schools. In addition, in terms of a costs/benefits debate, inclusion is seen as a costly mistake.

A second critique of inclusion questions the possibility of a truly transformative approach to educational change at both the school and systems level. This critique is expressed mainly from a post-structural perspective and focuses on the role of *difference* in the inclusive discourse. Graham and Slee (2008) argue that in the process of pointing to the exclusion of specific groups, attention is focused on the 'markers of difference' and thus difference is in fact created by comparison to an implicit norm. In other words, if we return to the Ofsted (2000) groups that may be considered for inclusion, these groupings not only 'fragment' the inclusion focus but reinforce a conception of them as 'problems' due to their difference – difference from a non-specified but dominant notion of what is considered normal.

To some extent according to this critique 'inclusion' cannot simply be constructed as the opposite of 'exclusion'. Inclusion and exclusion are interrelated processes and their interplay constantly creates new inclusive/exclusive conditions and possibilities. This critique is different from that expressed from a special education perspective. These writers are committed to social change in general education and to some extent this is a critique that comes from within the field of inclusive education. Nevertheless, it questions the 'grand project' of inclusive education as a straightforward one.

Finally, two related critiques of inclusion question *whether inclusion is the right course for all and whether there are limits to inclusion* when defined as all students having the access to the same experiences in the same educational settings. The Deaf community has asserted its preference to schools for the Deaf where students and teachers share a common language and culture. Thus the Deaf community adopts a very different position to the issue of access and participation from that of other groups within the Disability Movement and

results in a deep division between Deaf organizations and most other organiza-
tions of disabled people over how they perceive 'special education'. For the Deaf
community inclusion refers first to inclusion within the Deaf community itself.
Secondly, it refers to the inclusion of Deaf people within a world dominated by
people with hearing. Whereas the first focuses on an issue of identity, the sec-
ond focuses on the advocacy for social and political rights within a world which
is formed by the experiences and forms of interaction that are often alien to the
experiences of the Deaf. Similarly, Shakespeare (2006) questions what may con-
stitute inclusion as part of universal design for people with social impairments
such as autism. He argues that the development of facilities purposely designed
for people with autism may create spaces and times that provide an environ-
ment with limited disruptions and distress. He maintains that these solutions
tend to 'sound less like barrier-free provision, and more like the specialised and
perhaps even segregated provision of solutions for special needs. Ultimately,
some people with autism may prefer self-exclusion to inclusion' (Shakespeare,
2006: 49). The last sentence echoes teachers' concerns raised in many play-
grounds and classrooms where students with autism are included, and brings
together issues of characteristics of impairments, needs and choice.

At the beginning of this chapter it was argued that the power of inclusion as
a critical project lies in its extensive focus. Referring to 'education for *all*' or
'inclusion for *all*' has been and still is a powerful message. However this does
not mean that we should refrain from exploring what inclusion may mean for
different groups and how the experience and outcomes may differ for differ-
ent individuals and groups. Indeed, presenting inclusion as being 'for' those
who have previously been excluded is to focus on those individuals and
groups who have been excluded rather than upon the mainstream processes
which have defined normality and by doing so have framed the ideologies
and mechanisms of exclusion. The real power of the inclusive education
movement perhaps lies in its challenge to the power embedded in systems
defining who is to be included and on whose terms.

The claim to education for all is based on the acknowledgement that com-
monalities as well as differences characterize all learners and that one differ-
ence, that of impairment, does not and should not override the broader range
of commonalities and differences when thinking about the purpose of edu-
cational services. Setting cut-off points and exceptions to this principal weak-
ens the power of the idea of inclusion and justifies old and new forms of
segregation. Considering inclusion from different perspectives suggests how
specific types of difference have been constructed historically as learning and
behaviour problems in education systems, and how segregation, exclusion
and the language of 'special education' have been used to manage these prob-
lems and to maintain the smooth operation of the overall system. Inclusion
has had an impact on educational systems with the introduction of disability
anti-discrimination legislation, inclusion policies and an emphasis on how

schools respond to 'diversity'. However, in many cases inclusion has been reduced to a change of language rather than a change of practice, and in this context it is questionable whether much of the rhetoric and many of the reforms can really be represented as making progress towards genuinely inclusive approaches to education.

Summary

In this chapter it was argued that the failure of inclusive education to become a central force for education reform is not simply a repeat of history. The weakness of the 'inclusive perspective' is characterized by a theoretical vacuum; the great expectations of the early 1990s have been replaced by a lack of critical engagement with the realities of education and schools. This theoretical vacuum is ether hidden in the escapism of much of the postmodern writing on inclusion or the pragmatic watering-down of the underlying idealism of inclusion. Inclusion as a 'grand project' has *limitations* in terms of its engagement with difference and its partial success in proposing a feasible project for inclusion that can gain consensus and support from students and their families, teachers and schools. Nevertheless, it is by going back to the 'big picture of inclusion' and reformulating it in the light of knowledge, experiences and learning accumulated during the past 20 or so years that we can find a way forward.

Discussion questions

- Can we really refer to inclusion as a singular concept?
- Why is it important to clarify the definition of inclusion?
- Has inclusion turned into a 'soft' approach to dealing with populations that are increasingly perceived in terms of problems to be managed?
- Is this conception of inclusion another way of reinforcing the dominance of normality?
- What are the implications for the future of inclusion?

Further reading

Ainscow, M., Booth, T. and Dyson, A. (2006) *Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion*. London: Routledge.

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Tomlinson, S. (1982) *A Sociology of Special Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.