

# A Perspective of Inclusion: Challenges for the Future

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## Abstract

The term, *inclusion*, particularly in the educational setting, is still based on a deficit view. Perceptions of 'dis'-ability create barriers to true inclusion and are often reinforced through higher education training programs. To promote inclusive values, acceptance of individual and cultural differences must be included in all curricula, not solely within special education. The future of a truly inclusive education relies on a cultural shift that supports and nurtures differences, and views success through a lens not focused on standardization but on diversity. The Index for Inclusion (The Index) has been utilized worldwide to support schools, to remove perceived barriers and to establish increasingly inclusive school cultures and practices. The Index aids in the creation of a culture that is dedicated to identifying and reducing barriers to inclusion and increases the learning and participation for all students.

## Keywords

inclusion, inclusive education, segregation, marginalization, Index for Inclusion, diversity

## Introduction

In order to overcome the deficit view upon which the current understanding of inclusion is based, we must avoid segregation and discrimination as we meet specialized educational needs. A start in this direction is to change the language and the lens through which we view inclusion. In this paper, we conceive inclusion to be the fundamental right of all children and adults to fully participate, and contribute in all aspects of life and culture, without restriction or threat of marginalization. As an extension of this definition, inclusive education must be understood then not as a

decision about the placement of students, but rather as a school-wide philosophy dedicated to the spirit and resources needed to truly provide education for all. In recent years increased efforts have been made worldwide to educate traditionally marginalized groups. While increasing the access and equality of students with migrant backgrounds, cultural and linguistic

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diversity, gender based differences, students with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer students as well as gifted students in educational settings is a move in the right direction, true change cannot happen without first recognizing the value of having such a diverse body of students. We must dedicate ourselves to creating equal opportunities for all to achieve, by deconstructing and reconstructing our cultural and academic expectations, our educational gestalt, and by recognizing various forms of achievement and having an appreciation for what they are worth.

Currently, the educational *worth* of students continues to be based on outdated standards (Robinson, 2011). Educational systems continue to adhere to the notion that the role of education is to imbue knowledge based on classic ideals. Robinson (2011) has likened the current educational system in the U.S. to a factory with desirable output being students who are successful on a standardized test. This system is not set up to support a diverse body of students to achieve equal opportunities because it is based precisely on standardizing the means by which students demonstrate their worth. With the growth of global competition, the worth of students has been boiled down to the standardization of a score. High scores have become equivalent with determining who is worthy of participation in our society.

### **Access is Essential**

Overreliance on test scores to make educational placement and commencement decisions occurs worldwide (Heheir, 2002). If high scores on standardized tests are the measure of success, then marginalized students are at an even greater disadvantage

due to segregational, educational practices. Many students are not given access to the same learning experience or opportunities as other children. Separate schools, classrooms, or marginalization within the mainstream setting create different, and often less robust educational experiences, and yet the “worth” of these children is measured by the same standardized test used with every other child. How are these students expected to succeed? Heheir (2002) noted “Interpretations of what is *wrong* with students flow from these test scores and seldom give much weight to factors related to opportunity-to-learn, cultural differences, English language proficiency, bilingualism, or current instructional experiences” (p. 54). As evidence of this statement, the New York State Education Department (2013) reported that as of August 2010 only 27% of students with disabilities in the largest four cities graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma (44% in NYC). As Connor & Ferri (2007) write, over-dependence on segregated settings such as special education classrooms put students at a disadvantage.

To move inclusive educational practices forward, children must be permitted equality and access in education at all levels of schooling. It is clear that the promotion of an inclusive school culture requires that all school personnel value diversity and view differences as assets. This sentiment has been echoed around the world. For instance, the traditional paradigm that has underlined and has shaped German (and Austrian) education is the assumption that the homogeneity of learners in a group best facilitates individual learning (Sliwka, 2010, p. 209). But the shift from homogeneity (students getting the

same treatment) and heterogeneity (adjustments made to meet different needs) to diversity (differences serving as a resource for individual learning and development) requires not only a structural change, but also a change in how we approach student learning as well as the attitudes of teachers (Sliwka 2010).

“The deficit-driven, medical model conceptualizations of disability held by educators and administrators actively contribute to limiting the growth and support of inclusion” (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 65). Despite major changes in legislation and the growth of the inclusion movement, there exists continued segregation of students with disabilities and a paucity of inclusive classrooms (Hehir et al., 2005). We need to seize all opportunities to work against this development. To do this we must begin with teacher and school building leadership training programs. Global efforts to face future needs in teacher and school building leadership education include fostering dispositions that view diversity as an enriching aspect of classrooms. The challenge is to train professionals who are proficient in educating a diverse group of students while creating a classroom culture of acceptance and respect for all.

### **Future Educators**

“Inclusive systems of education are essential to improve the learning environment by deploying skilled teachers, equitably targeting financial and learning support to disadvantaged schools, and providing intercultural and bilingual education” (Unesco, 2010, p.2). This responsibility cannot belong solely to teachers and administrators. Training programs must be at the forefront of this shifting educational focus.

Future teachers must be familiar with new forms of knowledge regarding identity and difference that are based on inclusive values (Slee, 2001). One example of such a program is at the University of Cologne in Germany (“school is open” BildungRaumProjekt, 2011). Scholars there have presented an inclusive conceptual framework to be used with a partner school run by the university. This framework will enable teacher candidates to observe and participate with the university in lesson plan development and classroom instruction with a diverse group of children.

The partner school is based on the principals of the Canadian Equity Foundation Statement that ensures “that fairness, equity and inclusion are essential principles of [the] school system and are integrated into all (. . .) policies, programs, operations and practices” (Toronto District School Board, 2000). The school, in conjunction with the university, will work to develop an educational concept that will meet the needs of the heterogeneous student body.

It is not enough to change the curricular focus. Teacher training programs must also strive towards recruiting teacher candidates with disabilities and with diverse cultural, migrant and other backgrounds. It is imperative that teachers themselves represent the diversity that the philosophy of inclusion calls for. Teachers often form their attitudes towards students and schooling, based largely on their own experiences as a student. An effort must be made to counter these largely homogeneous educational experiences by including teachers and administrators from marginalized groups and to create training programs that will provide teacher and administrative candidates with experiences

that allow teacher candidates to fully experience diversity (ability, culturally, linguistically, etc.) by studying abroad and observing and participating in schools that demonstrate the best practices in educating a diverse student population.

Furthermore, teachers in training are segregated with respect to their certification area, and specialized educational pedagogies are reserved for candidates who pursue the area of special education teacher, leaving teachers in the other certification areas (early childhood, childhood and secondary education) with only the most rudimentary understanding of how to instruct a diverse group of students.

This problem is demonstrated when general education teachers (i.e., teachers certified in early childhood, childhood or secondary education) are asked about their perceptions of their own ability to teach students with a variety of learning needs. Research shows that general education teachers feel unprepared and/or unable to teach students with disabilities (DeSimone & Parmar, 2003; Smith & Smith, 2000; Stahl, 2002), and that they feel that teaching students with disabilities involves additional time and resources that in turn restricts their ability to teach students without identified disabilities (Rose, 2001), indicating that teachers are focusing on curriculum and not on pedagogy. "Regular classroom teachers learned to view themselves as unprepared for this responsibility. Their experience has been that special education resource teachers and educational assistants are the only ones who can accept the responsibility" for teaching students with disabilities (Bunch, Al-Salah, Pearpoint 2011, p. 6).

This segregation during training may also lead teachers to view students with

disabilities less favorably. Chalmers and Lee (2011), Cook (2002), Mahar, Terras, Chiasson, Stough and Palmer (2001) and Gao and Mager (2011) found that teachers' attitudes towards students differed according to the students' classification of disability, with students with challenging behavior receiving the least favorable rating.

The problem continues even as we see more students with disabilities educated in classrooms with non-disabled peers. Many children with special education needs integrated in regular classrooms, continue to be taught separately, by special education teachers, inside the classroom (as push in services) and/or outside the classroom (as pull out services) thus continuing to be segregated within the walls of the *inclusive classroom*.

As Demmer-Dieckmann (2011) wrote, "It is no longer a question of if, but how teacher forces are prepared for inclusive thinking and acting". It is clear that teachers' and school leaders' abilities, and positive attitudes toward inclusion are essential for inclusion to succeed. Teacher and school building leadership training programs must take responsibility to change the disjointed way in which we educate our educators and school building leaders. We must create a curriculum that models the unity and collaboration that schools require to meet the diverse needs of students, and we must teach teacher and administrative candidates to view diversity as a valuable asset and not to fear differences. To facilitate inclusive thinking and acting, we must provide all teacher candidates and school building leadership candidates with knowledge about diversity and the pedagogy needed to embark on their practice with confidence.

## Consequences of Inclusion

Researchers note that when students are included, they have better academic outcomes than students with identified special needs in special classes (Blackorby et al., 2005; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2010). Improved social acceptance and peer relations (Caywood & Fordyce, 2006; Preuss-Lausitz, 2002; Vaughn, 1998) and an increase in self-esteem (Walther-Thomas, 1997) have also been identified. Students with hearing or visual impairments, and students with multiple mental and physical disabilities, did not perform better academically when educated in special schools (Jan Pijl, Nakken & Mand, 2003). Following a review of 12 studies Jan Pijl, Nakken and Mand (2003) concluded that inclusion for students with disabilities has to be seen as an important alternative.

Additionally, participation in inclusive educational programs improves post-schooling outcomes. The European Commission Lifelong Learning Policy Report (2009) notes a positive relationship between educational attainment and employment. In the U.S., students with disabilities in inclusive classes were more likely to “pass state exams, complete high school, attend college, obtain a job, earn a higher salary and live independently” Salend (2011, p. 31). Conversely, in Switzerland Eckhart, Haeberlin, Lozano and Blanc (2011) found that attendance in a special school reduced one’s chances of obtaining an apprenticeship, or access to a profession after graduation. Walther-Thomas (1995) also wrote about the benefits of inclusion to students with no identified special education needs. General education students in co-taught, inclusive classes, enjoyed additional teacher attention, improved academic achievement and increased study skill

instruction. Furthermore, improved classroom communities were identified (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Jan Pijl, Nakken & Mand (2003) noted that non-disabled students developed a positive attitude towards their disabled peers as a result of an inclusive educational environment, and that overall learning in class improved (Jan Pijl, Nakken & Mand, 2003).

## Resistance to Inclusive Education

Despite a growing movement towards the model of educational inclusion, a number of vocal opponents including parents, teachers and educational scholars, continue to resist the change. As Connor (2008) noted, “scholars and educators satisfied with the existing special education framework felt that the foundation on which they stood was under attack” (p. 16). Yet it is precisely this type of training program where the seeds of marginalization and exclusion are cultivated.

An additional barrier of parental resistance has also been voiced. Parents of children in mainstream schools express concern about the negative effects of diversity in their children’s class and express fears that this diversity will negatively affect the academic achievement of their children. As a result, many parents place their children in private schools (Aigner, 2013). Speaking as a teacher in an inclusive classroom in the U. S. and as the mother of a child with autism, Barr (2008) stated, “It [inclusion] is not appropriate for children who would need a curriculum that is wholly different from the general education curriculum” (p.35). Parents cite the fear that inclusive education meant giving up guaranteed specialized educational services for their children who require these services

to be successful (Lieberman, 1992). These parents view *Special Education* not as a service, but as a place. However, Matuszny, Banda and Coleman (2007) found that parents' perceptions of inclusion were more positive when they had increased participation in the decisions surrounding the educational services that their child received suggesting that inclusive values may be fostered by simply engaging in a dialogue and encouraging equal participation.

Resistance to inclusion appears largely to be based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that inclusion means *a student with a disability educated with non-disabled peers*. This exceptionally narrow vision of inclusion, perpetuated by many education professionals, leaves out other vulnerable groups and provides the opportunity to create reasons not to include children based on educational needs. The understanding of inclusion presented here: full participation and contribution in all aspects of life and culture, without restriction or threat of marginalization creates no such barrier. In fact, it is difficult to envision parents or scholars opposing this sentiment. Indeed the fear of not getting appropriate accommodations or adequate services for children may be lessened if we can agree that an inclusive vision should hold a much broader view of membership and that services for students are a vital necessity for children to be able to contribute to the greatest extent possible in society. This expanded view of inclusion may provide the shift needed to eliminate the underlying supposition that this *place* called special education can provide resources that *inclusive settings* cannot. The fear of denial of needed resources in deference to *inclusion* leads to the second

assumption, *inadequate educational commodities*, concern regarding shortage of limited resources.

Educational commodities such as teacher time and attention, tangible resources and physical space are at a minimum in many schools, thus facilitating the perception that students with additional educational needs take more than their share leaving others with less than they need. In the current political and educational climate the need for resources has never been greater. High stakes testing procedures create an additional pressure on schools and teachers to teach more to an increasingly diverse group of students while school funding is being cut back. Yet perhaps we can shift the perception that diversity is a drain on resources to the view that difference is an asset in creating a rich and dynamic school environment. Reciprocal in nature, inclusive educational practices both foster and reflect the values of a society. The UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008) promoted the political will for inclusive education in educational and social settings of all kind. Working towards inclusion entails celebrating differences of culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual education, needs and abilities. With a broadened view of inclusion we may re-conceptualize classrooms as microcosms of our increasingly inclusive society.

### **Inclusion is a Model of Democracy**

Democracy is about valuing diverse communities in society and these values are reflected in schools. "In its deepest sense, inclusion is a model of democracy at work that holds relevance for all of us" (Valle & Connor, 2011, p.65). By fostering a school

culture of respect and belonging, teachers provide students with opportunities to learn about and to accept individual differences, and to diminish the marginalization of vulnerable groups. Inclusion in education is critical, not only in its relevance to schooling, but also in its connection to the participation of all beyond education (Booth, 2011).

### **Changing our Lens**

Meaningful inclusion cannot be realized until we change our cultural and educational expectations to value numerous forms of achievement to and recognize the contributions of all members of our society. The language a society uses to address social issues is extremely meaningful in understanding how matters are viewed and addressed. Terms such as *disorders*, *challenged*, *suffers* are commonly used when discussing persons with academic or educational needs. Indeed, it is common in the US to say a student is *in* special education; however, the language by which we discuss supporting all students is changing. Through their work with The Index for Inclusion (The Index), Booth and Ainscow (2000, 2011) have rejected traditional labels associated with specialized educational needs. The authors instead have replaced the term *special educational needs*, with that of *barriers to learning and participation* creating a systematic approach where inclusion meets diversity. Thus acquiring competencies to promote inclusive cultures, structures, and practices requires the ability to increase learning and participation for all students and to emphasize these types of competencies in the educational experience of all candidates in teacher training programs (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011).

### **The Index for Inclusion**

The Index was developed at the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) in collaboration with the University of Manchester and the Christ Church University College, Canterbury. First published in 2000 it represents the product of three years of development – conducted by a detailed process of research – in 25 schools across England (Rustemier & Booth, 2005). It was then distributed to 26, 000 primary, secondary and special schools and local education authorities (Vislie, 2003). Since then it has been adapted for use in many other countries and translated into thirty-seven languages. Versions of The Index for Early Childhood, Child-Care Settings 2004 and 2006 and Communities 2011 were also published. The third edition (2011) published by Tony Booth responds to suggestions from colleagues all over the world and extended the work on inclusive values and their implications for curricula construction (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

The Index includes three dimensions; Dimension A: Creating inclusive *culture*; Dimension B: Producing inclusive *policies*; and Dimension C: Evolving inclusive *practices*. These dimensions aid in the movement toward inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Each dimension contains statements or indicators against which existing arrangements in the specific school setting can be compared by self-assessment. These help to identify and implement priorities for change. “Each indicator is connected to questions which define its meaning, refine exploration, spark reflection and dialogue, and prompt further questions” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 13). Because The Index is a tool to develop a framework it can be used to draw together multiple inclusive

policies. “It is through inclusive school cultures, that changes in policies and practices can be sustained” (Booth & Ainscow 2002, p. 8).

### **Planning Framework**

Because The Index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011) supports a dialogue among stakeholders, and uses a participatory approach to self-evaluation, it approximates inclusive development. The Index (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011) provides a tool for developing inclusive schools. “Fundamental to the Index for Inclusion is the creation of a school culture that encourages a preoccupation with the development of ways of working that attempt to reduce barriers to the learning and participation of all students” (Oswald, 2010, p. 91). The Index presents the most detailed explanation of what an inclusive school should look like (Ainscow, 2007). It describes key concepts to support thinking about inclusive school, preschool, and community development and provides two things: 1) a set of indicators describing inclusive education, in terms of cultures, policies and practices; and 2) an approach to school, institutional and community development (Braunsteiner & Germany 2009a).

### **The Index in Use**

“Inclusion is most importantly seen as putting inclusive values into action.” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 21). While Booth widely extended the values from the 2002 edition to the 2011 edition, there is emphasis on five values – equality, participation, community, respect for diversity, and sustainability – that “may contribute more than the others to establishing inclusive school structures, procedures and activities.” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 21). These values have to

be linked to every action in school, to the curricula, the interactions and relationships between all persons in school and beyond.

The Index has been utilized worldwide to support schools to remove perceived barriers and to establish increasingly inclusive school cultures and practices. It has been used in the development of policies and practices of schools, institutions and communities (Duke, 2009; Boban & Hinz, 2011; Hinz et al., 2012; Montag Stiftung Jugend und Gesellschaft (Ed.), 2011; Norfolk County Council, 2012) as well as used to develop and deliver professional development (Education Queensland, Department of Education Training and Employment, 2009). The Index has also been utilized to bring together separate institutions, such as school and community or two separate schooling systems, to create unity and to reduce barriers to participation (Braunsteiner & Germany 2011; Braunsteiner & Germany 2009a, 2009b).

### **The Future of Inclusive Education**

Educational segregation experienced by people with differences not only induces conditions that lead to poverty, but marginalization itself diminishes the fullness of the individual’s experiences. Even the term *inclusion*, particularly in the educational setting, is based on a deficit view. Perceptions of ‘dis’-ability create barriers to true inclusion and are often reinforced through higher education training programs. To promote inclusive values, acceptance of individual and cultural differences must be included in all curricula, not solely within *special education*. The future of a truly inclusive education relies on a cultural shift that supports and nurtures

differences and views *success* through a lens not constructed of standardized test scores.

We must educate both our teachers and our students to work collaboratively to celebrate diversity through tools such as The Index. Taking advantage of an increasing awareness about inclusive education in legislation and policy, we have to share and disseminate information about existing policy and practice. Inclusion is “a principled approach to the development of education and society. It is linked to democratic participation within and beyond education.” (Booth, 2011) The contribution of diverse stakeholders in the development of a school’s culture and environment must grow. As Sapon-Shevin (2003) asks, “what kind of a world do we want to create, and how should we educate students for that world?” (p. 26).

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