

Introduction

What is inclusion?

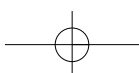
Inclusion is an elusive concept in spite of several definitions from experts, organisations and countries as well as other individuals. These definitions addressed a host of issues. Inclusion is a concept that is relevant in all countries around the world. However, the concept is interpreted in a wide range of ways. The basis for the differences is not consistent and it seems to have evolved over time.

The concept of inclusion has been defined particularly in reference to special educational needs (SEN). Ainscow (1999) argued that inclusion relates to more than children with SEN and disabilities, and is an ongoing process that does not stop at any stage. Some other definitions relate to the whole community, or to a philosophical stance linking to ethical values and beliefs.

In some countries, the terms inclusion and integration are used interchangeably. Several teachers or practitioners prefer to use integration rather than inclusion because they are more familiar with the concept (Hodkinson and Devarakonda, 2009).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) views inclusion as something that relates to those who are not able to access basic education. These children may be from disadvantaged families, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, ethnic minorities, families with English or other major language as an additional language, or those children who are affected by natural disasters, children with HIV/AIDS or with specific learning needs.

Allan (2008) refers to the notion that inclusion is evolving. Inclusion is a concept that has been an issue of contention between different scholars; the divergence relates to what is entailed in inclusion.



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Allan (2008) commented about teachers' experiences and response to inclusion. Some were confused about how to create inclusive provision. Allan noted the frustration of a teacher being unable to account for the lack of inclusion and being answerable to children, parents, policy-makers and politicians. She warned that practitioners are guilty of being unable to include everybody appropriately as a result of failure associated with their inclusive practice, and that they are exhausted in trying to meet the diverse needs of children.

Reference is often made to highly emotive debates between the pro inclusion and pro special school experts. Both groups are influenced by their strong idealisms and are critical of each other. Inclusion is not just about schools; it is much broader and encompasses a wide range of issues from birth throughout life.

There are several definitions of inclusion that emphasise a number of issues, as the following definitions illustrate (Table I.1):

Table I.1 Analysis of definitions presented

Definition	Year	Focus of the definition	Key idea/highlight	Criticism
UNESCO	2000	Elementary education	Removing all barriers, participation, overcoming all exclusion	Focus on education
Ainscow	1999	Not only with pupils with disabilities, never-ending process	Overcoming barriers	Feasibility of practice, attitudes, wide range of people involved
Corbett and Slee	2000	Metaphor, comparison of integration and inclusion	Celebration of differences	Attitudes of practitioners to celebrate differences
Alliance for Inclusive Education	2004	Whole community	Diversity of strengths, abilities and needs	Attitudes of practitioners to focus on strengths of individuals
OFSTED	2000	Broad – to relate to different categories of children	Children from different groups	Focus on schools

- 'Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate success for all children. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all' (UNESCO, 2000, p. 6).

- 'The agenda of inclusive education has to be concerned with overcoming barriers to participation that may be experienced by any pupils. As we have seen, however, the tendency is still to think of inclusion policy or inclusive education as being concerned only with pupils with disabilities and others categorized as having 'special education needs'. Furthermore, inclusion is often seen as simply involving the movement of pupils from special to mainstream contexts, with the implication that they are 'included' once they are there. In contrast, I see inclusion as a never ending process rather than a simple change of state, and as dependent on continuous pedagogical and organisational development within the mainstream' (Ainscow, 1999, p. 218).
- 'An interesting metaphor presented by Corbett views integration as the square peg struggling to fit into a round hole (Corbett and Slee, 2000, p. 140). Inclusion on the other hand is treated as a circle containing many different shapes and sizes, everything relating to the whole with a caption "*Come in. We celebrate difference here. You can be yourself and not struggle to fit in*" (italics added). Inclusive education is one step ahead of integration – more assertive, life enhancing and visionary' (Corbett and Slee, 2000).
- 'A philosophy which views diversity of strengths, abilities and needs as natural and desirable, bringing to any community the opportunity to respond in ways which lead to learning and growth for the whole community and giving each and every member a valued role' (Mason, Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2004).
- According to OFSTED (2000, p. 4):
 - Its scope is broad.
 - It is about equal opportunities for all, whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, disability, attainment and background.
 - It pays particular attention to the provision made for the achievement of different groups.

Analysis of definitions presented

Inclusion and integration are two concepts that are commonly used interchangeably especially at national and international settings levels. Schneider (2009) refers to a third concept in addition to integration and inclusion. 'Common instruction' (*Gemeinsamer Unterricht*) is a term used in German settings. This concept refers to integration of special education and mainstream education. Teachers are teaching together, and children are learning with each other. In the USA, mainstreaming is a common term used to refer to inclusion, and references made to inclu-

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sion relate to education of children with disabilities. Some terms that are used which are similar to inclusion include mainstreaming, integration, normalisation, least restrictive environment, deinstitutionalisation and regular education initiative. Mainstreaming in the US refers to children with special educational needs or disabilities.

Who has a right to be included – children, parents, professionals, teachers, practitioners? Several misconceptions relate to ideas of who should be included. Several settings and practitioners around the world expect to be only for children and especially those with disabilities or SEN as the concept originally evolved.

Policy moves through different levels to reach grass-roots level where the children and their families are able to access services. The movement of policy trickling through different levels might lose the significance intended at the grass-roots level. The policy cascading from global to national, and then to regional to local and then to the early childhood setting (Figure I.1) will lead to the policy being diluted and perhaps misinterpreted. Further, the implementation of policy in the early childhood setting may not reflect the vision of the policy-maker at global or national or regional levels. As the policy-making decisions are often made at the top level and trickled down to the other levels in the hierarchy, the face of the policy may take several different shapes that may be difficult to compare with the original vision. In addition to the cultures of the individual countries having an impact on the policy at regional and local levels, an individual's attitude and the ethos of the setting might have significant impact on the implementation of the policy.

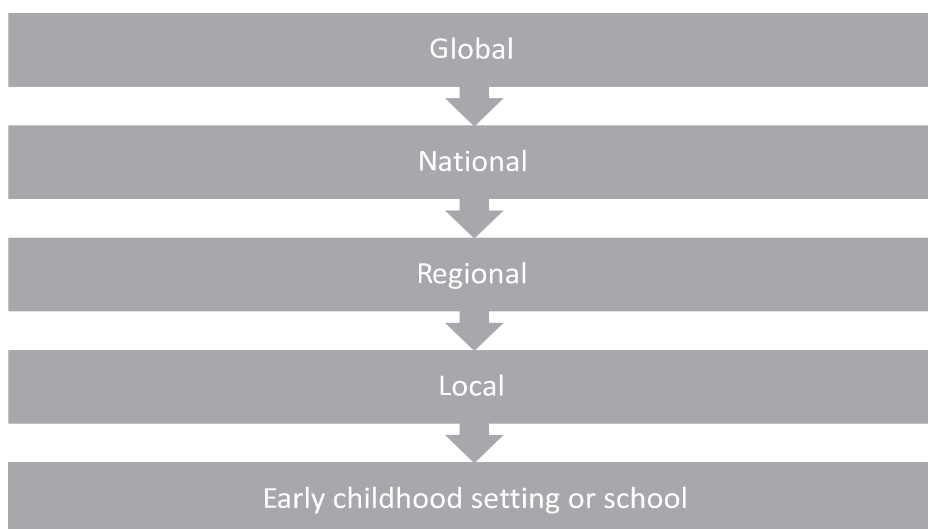


Figure I.1 The flow of the concept of inclusion policy at different levels

At global or universal level, the right to inclusive education was recommended in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) which expected schools to change and adapt according to the needs of children. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) refers to inclusive education as a legal right. At national level, these policies have been embraced and have been cascaded to grass-roots or setting level through regional and local policies.

The discussions around inclusion consistently debated how early childhood practitioners or teachers have either referred to inclusion as being idealistic or not realistic. In several settings, they may pay lip-service or be tokenistic in their practice.

Arenas of inclusion/exclusion

Nutbrown and Clough (2006: 5) list a range of issues based on:

- age;
- achievement;
- challenging behaviour;
- disability;
- disaffection;
- emotional and behavioural difficulty;
- employment;
- gender;
- housing;
- language;
- mental health;
- physical impairment;
- poverty;
- race/ethnicity;
- religion;
- sexual orientation;
- social class;
- special educational need.

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Inclusion as a concept has been shrouded by confusion, misunderstandings and differences of opinion, and so it remains a significant issue debated by policy-makers and practitioners at diverse levels. Inclusive education has diverse origins and influences, which include communities, activists and advocates, professional- and parent-driven movements, international governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Inclusion as a concept has been interpreted in different ways in various countries, organisations and by individuals. Inclusion means different things to different people and can often reflect stages of development of inclusive practices. Indeed, 'inclusion' can only really mean anything in practice, and there are as many versions of inclusion as there are settings, practitioners, children and families who together make up particular living and learning cultures (Clough and Nutbrown, 2006).

The definitions of inclusion encompass a range of viewpoints based on boundaries – school setting to wider society, diversity in terms of race, sex, religion, and so on, and human rights. Ainscow et al. (2006) have suggested that different definitions of inclusion can be divided into two categories – descriptive and prescriptive. Definitions of inclusion under the descriptive category relate to how inclusion is implemented in practice. Prescriptive definitions of inclusion refer to how the definition can be interpreted and used by others. Further, they have classified the ways in which the concept of inclusion has been defined in six different ways:

1. Inclusion is concerned with disabled students and others categorised as 'having special educational needs'.
2. Inclusion as a response to disciplinary inclusion.
3. Inclusion in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion.
4. Inclusion as developing the school for all.
5. Inclusion as 'Education for all'.
6. Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society.

Corbett (2001) refers to inclusion as not only about disability but recommends schools to celebrate differences by recognising the individual needs of children (Figure I.2). Corbett (2001: 58) also refers to the 'Dump and hope model' in which placing a child in a mainstream school is not a criterion for successful inclusive education. Practitioners' references to inclusion are characterised by a sense of frustration, guilt and exhaustion, and moral panic (Allan, 2008).

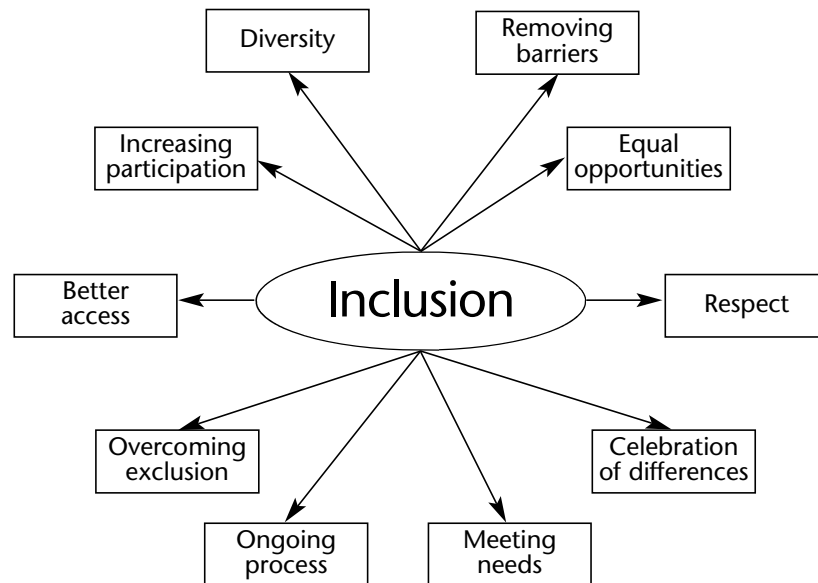


Figure I.2 Some terms that have been associated with inclusion



Activity

In two groups, prepare for a scholarly debate by having a discussion about one of the following statements:

1. Inclusion works and is great because ...
2. Inclusion is idealistic and does not work in reality.

Is this inclusion?

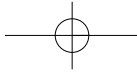
A setting tries to communicate with a 3-year-old bilingual child in Mandarin. The setting has a wide range of multicultural resources and displays several notices in Mandarin.

Another setting encourages other children to learn some words in Mandarin and to relate to the displays written in Mandarin. Extended family members – siblings, parents and grandparents – are invited to help decorate the setting with Chinese-style decorations.

Which practice is an example of inclusion? How can this practice be adapted to different situations in early childhood settings?

Debates and controversies

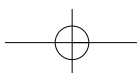
1. Is inclusion idealistic? This is how it is perceived by several practitioners and school teachers who believe it is not appropriate for



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all children to be part of all activities in the setting. Is it possible to include all children fairly?

2. Inclusion is a child's right. All children have a right to go to a school that is attended by their peers and friends. This has been emphasised by several pieces of legislation and policies at global, national, regional and local level. However, children are not always able to access this right because there is a lack of access owing to location and negative attitudes towards the education of girls (especially in poor countries). In addition, some schools and early childhood settings are unable to meet the diverse and complicated needs of children with multiple disabilities.
3. Is inclusion considered as abuse? Several reports refer to inclusion of children in inappropriate mainstream settings as abuse. The needs of these children may not be met. In addition, some children may be being bullied by other children for being different.
4. Inclusion versus exclusion – the underlying principle behind providing the opportunities to access learning or meeting the needs of children would depend on the ethos of the setting as well as individual attitudes; some children may not be able to access educational opportunities because of lack of resources, funding or appropriate training for practitioners to deal with children with diverse needs.
5. Is it fair on other children that attention is focused on children with SEN and/or disabilities? Would this disadvantage those children who did not have any specific additional needs? Children with disabilities are still combating blatant educational exclusion – they account for one-third of all out-of-school children. Working children, those belonging to indigenous groups, rural populations and linguistic minorities, nomadic children and those affected by HIV/AIDS are among other vulnerable groups.
6. Is inclusive education, a concept from the North, being imposed on the rest of the world? Some indigenous communities around the world have been attributed to be inclusive. For example, a concept from Hindu philosophy is called '*vasudeiva kutumbakam*' – relating to the concept of how their whole world is considered to be a big family. The term is made up of three Sanskrit words – *vasudha*, *eva* and *kutumbakam*. *Vasudha* means the earth, *Eva* means emphasizing and *Kutumbakam* means family. It means that the whole earth is just one family. The idea originates from Upanishads, an ancient Indian text, and is considered an integral part of the Hindu philosophy. Here, inclusion relates to interrelationships among people across society. The analogy of family



signifies the relationships among people highlighting togetherness. This philosophy has influenced Indian society for the past few centuries but has been muddled with several influences.

7. Is inclusive education expensive? Can poor countries afford it? Is inclusive education practical, particularly in countries with few resources?
8. Is inclusion a fashionable and politically correct concept or is it possible to implement it in all settings?
9. An effort is made to include children in mainstream settings as a result of being excluded.
10. Teacher training – how much are the teachers or practitioners prepared in their initial qualifications or training through continuing professional development (CPD) or qualifications that may prepare for specific jobs around childcare? Is it feasible for a teacher or practitioner to be trained and confident to be able to meet the diverse needs of all children?

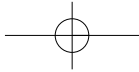
In this book

Inclusion in this book takes evidence from a wider perspective and each chapter elaborates on issues such as gender, race and culture, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) families, English as additional language (EAL), special educational needs (SEN), and disability. Staff members working in the early childhood settings are referred to as early childhood practitioners and the settings are referred to as early childhood settings.

Several practitioners and teachers believe that inclusion is idealistic, not realistic in real-life settings. There are several teachers who believe inclusion to be a failure. Inclusion is perceived from the perspective of children, their families (parents, carers, guardians, siblings and grandparents) and practitioners (in early childhood settings, teachers from schools).

Civilization is the process in which one gradually increases the number of people included in the term 'we' or 'us' and at the same time decreases those labelled 'you' or 'them' until that category has no one left in it. (Howard Winters, 1994)

Winters relates to the concept of civilisation explicitly by referring to the notion of inclusion that appears to be simple and justified. In the current context, our society is considered to be civilised and 'everybody' included. However, there are several groups of people who find



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themselves to be excluded because of a variety of barriers entrenched in society. These groups include children, parents and teachers who may be engaged in including or excluding others.

Ways in which children, practitioners and parents can be included are suggested through a range of adapted appropriate resources, enabling and empowering everybody to develop to their full potential in an inclusive and mutually respected society.

Further reading

Allan, J. (2008) *Rethinking Inclusion: The Philosophers of Difference in Practice*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Nutbrown, C. and Clough, P. (2006) *Inclusion in the Early Years*. London: Sage.

Stubbs, S. (2002) *Inclusive Education: Where There Are Few Resources*. Oslo: Atlas Alliance.

Useful websites

Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE), <http://www.csie.org.uk/>.

Enabling Education Network (EENET), <http://www.eenet.org.uk/>.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), <http://www.unesco.org>.

