

## **Including Inclusion**

### **Exploring inclusive education for school leadership**

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#### **Introduction**

In order to clarify what an inclusive model of schooling might look like it is necessary to examine how the idea of inclusion has developed over time. In the first instance, inclusion draws on a range of ideas and concepts developed in other domains and in other cognate disciplines i.e. it draws on discourses within fields such as social justice, diversity, equality, democracy, citizenship and identity. Consequently, it could be accused of exhibiting high levels of conceptual borrowing. Arguably this contributes to a degree of eclecticism, creating some difficulty when offered as a rationale or framework upon which to base and shape a system of schooling. Secondly, what inclusion means in different school systems is varied. This diversity is derived from how inclusion is filtered through and mediated by different national, cultural and socio-historical contexts. The manner in which many of the discourses that serve to construct the idea of inclusion are contested within their own fields also contribute to this variation in interpretations. It is not surprising, therefore, that the sum of the parts becomes overwhelming, resulting at times in conceptual fuzziness which in turn contributes to practices that, while claiming to be inclusive, are far from it. In essence, the discourses that frame what inclusive schooling looks like are formed of many different contested concepts mediated by very specific, deeply rooted and sedimented (Layder, 1997) assumptions about what education should be like.

When the process of leading inclusive schools is considered, many of the flaws in current approaches to professional development of school leaders become evident. The instrumentalist 'what works' approaches that frequently inform programme content fall very short of the mark with respect to the type of thinking school leaders need to engage in if they are to work towards the goal of an inclusive school. A key issue here is the imperative for current and future leaders to engage, in a reflective and intellectual way, with the constituents of the socio-cultural context of the diversity of school communities. The development of 'inclusion leaders', therefore,

could be described as a process of fine-tuning a mindset – a deliberative and critical way of looking at the world thereby impacting very decisively the way one acts in the world. Essentially this process is ideological ‘based upon alternative views of the world and the nature and form of schooling that will build that world’ (Slee, 2011, p. 25). Striving for inclusion and inclusive schooling explicitly requires a particular value base and a very clear sense of vision for a particular type of education system that will contribute to a much more broadly experienced common good. It cannot be assumed that this value base is a naturally occurring attribute of all leaders and consequently all dimensions of the socio-cultural field as they relate to inclusion need to be problematized in any development work with school leaders. This paper seek to begin to do this for the purposes of framing a discussion with respect to inclusive schools system in the broadest sense of the concept

### **Broadening perspectives on inclusion**

The idea of inclusion is ‘generally understood around the world as part of the human rights agenda that demands access to, and equity in, education’ (Florian, 2008, p. 202). As a concept, it was originally aligned to the developments within the field of special education needs (SEN) when thinking shifted from the idea of integration to the more challenging idea of inclusion, resulting in a preference for the mainstreaming of special education provision (Warnock, 1978). The imperative that inclusion should replace integration stems from a view that integration had become a reductive mechanism for measuring students disability with a view to calculating the resources required to make the student fit into the mainstream system. The initial move towards inclusion as the mainstay of policy was given added impetus by a range of international developments which strongly supported this model of schooling (see for example the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). The Salamanca statement presented inclusion as a two-dimensional process of increasing participation and removing barriers. Despite this broad support, an examination of current practice and much of the scholarship in the field reveals that inclusion has not being achieved for students with SEN. Many agree that what happened in practice was little more than a

recalibration of inclusion so that in effect what has emerged is, at best, a model of integration (Dyson, 2001).

From 2005 onwards, the concept of inclusive education was broadened to include the full diversity of learners (Opertti, 2010). UNESCO's defined inclusion as,

a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (UNESCO, 2005 p. 13)

Scholarship from the field of social justice and equality has also contributed to the discourse surrounding inclusion. Legislative changes in some countries added a legal imperative to the drive towards inclusion. In the Republic of Ireland for example, the Equal Status Acts (Government of Ireland, 2000–2004) names 9 grounds where discrimination is prohibited in the provision of goods, accommodation and education (see Lodge and Lynch, 2003). In this framework disability is included alongside race and ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender, membership of the travelling community, age and marital status. UNESCO's 48th International Conference on Education in 2008 (ICE) strongly reaffirmed this 'broadened concept of inclusive education.... as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities' (ICE, 2008 cited in Opertti 2011 pp. 21–22). All of these developments have implications for schools and in all cases education providers of all types are mentioned explicitly in legislation and policy documentation.

### **Inclusion and special education provision**

Inclusion as a construct is a highly contested area in education both in terms of what is encompassed by the term inclusion itself and by the variety of attempts, in practice, in various contexts, to deliver an inclusive education system. It is clear from the literature that inclusive education has experienced significant operational/implementation difficulties in many countries, most notably in those who have a long track record in pursuing the inclusion agendas (see Allan, 2008). Within the context of Special Educational Needs (SEN) inclusion has been challenged by a number of scholars see for example (Allan, Florian, Graham and Slee). Teacher unions cite

‘strain on teachers and the damage done to children and young people by inclusion’ (Allan, 2008, p. 9) questioning ‘teachers capacity to keep up with the demands of inclusion’ (Allan, 2008, p. 1). Within the more specific field of SEN, inclusion has been critiqued with some dismissing it as ‘an ideological and unproven bandwagon’ (ibid). Julie Allan in her seminal review of the idea of inclusive education begins her analysis by mapping out what she calls territories of failure with respect to inclusion; ‘there is little doubt that inclusion has a troubled existence and that it is being written off, at least in some quarters, as an abject failure’ (Allan, 2008, p. 9). The exclusion of certain children from mainstream schools has become legitimate especially if it can be argued that they would have a potentially negative effect on the majority of children within the mainstream (Slee, 2011; Allan, 2008).

One of the key problems for the construct of inclusion may be that it is largely constructed within the domain of special education needs. In this context, all too often, special means exclusionary (Mittler, 2008) and needs signals dependency (Corbett, 1996). In this way the idea of inclusion constructs winners and losers delineated by the normative and competitive nature of our schools (Benjamin, 2002). It is here that there is considerable evidence of problematic practice especially for children who have moderate to severe profound difficulties and very often children who exhibit moderate or severe emotional and behavioural problems. This results in these areas being prioritized in much of the discourse in relation to inclusion. Broader notions of inclusion seem to get less of a hearing. Even when the idea of equality and social justice are mentioned there are either linked directly to SEN (Florian, 2008) or the argument quickly slips back to the consideration of SEN. This paper seeks to keep the consideration of inclusion firmly in the broader context and to decouple the discussion from SEN or at least to hold it static while consideration is given to the broader remit of the construct. Approaching inclusion from the perspective and politics of difference rather than the deficit focus of SEN may begin to facilitate alternative thinking and allow the reality of diversity in all its forms into the debate. It is unlikely, one would hope, if approached in this way, that a school would be required to build up a case for additional resource hours/ teaching time to deal with an A-stream, well-behaved, LGBT student. This is not in any way to deny the specific issues of resource that are absolutely essential to deliver robust SEN support, it is

rather to move us away from an impasse that seems to have prevented the idea of inclusion developing, to any great extent, in a broader field of praxis. It may also serve to challenge to the orthodoxy of the standard, the normal curve and the tyranny of outcome focused accountable models of schooling. This trinity has framed the school experience of students with any kind of additional learning need or claim to any non-dominant identity position for far too long.

It is argued here that this pursuit of diagnosis and the practice of labelling associated with it has resulted in the reification of the individuals' special educational need which sometimes resulted in the individual being recognisable to others and even to themselves primarily by their special need. This in itself is problematic but also neglects the idea of the complex nature of identity and the manner in which the intersectionality (Anthias, 2008) of gender, race, class, ethnicity etc. impact the individual's ability to derive maximum benefit from education. The 'single axis framework' (Crenshaw, 1994, p. 40) driving SEN and the manner in which praxis relating to SEN plays out in schools have too often precluded the idea of intersectionality. A fundamental question here is the lack of a dominant approach within education to take the individual from where they are at and include them in a school system that views differing abilities and backgrounds as a strength rather than a contextual space to engage in multiple forms of educational triage. It may well be that the source of the reading problem of a working class boy with a diagnoses of dyslexia may be culturally located with the result that the boy may not see any purpose or meaning in reading. All the phonic programmes in the world, targeting at fixing the child, may well fail as they do not address the root cause of the problem (Mac Ruairc, 2009).

Within the context of the broader notion of inclusion, some attempts have been made to include students from the diversity in society more proactively. Recent change to the demographic in Irish society resulting in the inclusion of students from different ethnic backgrounds is a case in point (Devine, 2012). While there is some evidence of good practice, in many cases, the form inclusion takes can resemble a type of tokenistic lip service to difference where an acknowledgement of race and ethnicity often involves a fetishized international day or international week. This 4 f mode of inclusion family, food, fashion and festivals (Banks 2002) does little to address the

fundamental exclusionary thrust of issues such as school curricula, cultural norms and expectations or the benignly perceived, but powerfully exclusionary notion, of 'tradition'. Some fundamental traditional views in relation to patterns of participation in education prevail either tacitly in terms of assumptions or explicitly in terms of particular forms of practice that continue to exist in schools. In summary, it is clear from the breath of scholarship and the range of different discourses that feed into a consideration of inclusion, and the number of stakeholders involved that it is a very contested terrain. Tinkering at the edges produces little real change. A more systematic consideration is necessary in order to map out the main issues that are contested.

### **Why inclusion?**

The type of school system that is envisaged by an inclusive model of schooling shares many of the aspirations of other cognate areas. Those who call for great equity in school systems, those who seek a greater focus on social justice and equality all share a similar platform and hold compatible views on what schools should be like. Within the field of leadership, those who call for a truly transformative type of leadership are strongly aligned with the idea of inclusive school system (see for example Shields, 2013). What a consideration of inclusion brings to the discourse is another set of concepts, many of which are directly traceable into practice, that can be used in an analytical way to disrupt the assumptions and reproductive practices that characterise our deeply unequal school systems. The remainder of this paper, therefore, will focus on this by problematizing the construct of inclusion itself (Graham and Slee, 2008), challenging the focus on the exceptional (Allan, 2008) as well as critiquing the deeply seated patterns of practice that continue to exclude certain groups from the maximum benefits of the emancipatory power of education broadly defined.

### **The heart of the matter – deconstructing the discourse**

In order to fully appreciate the complexity of the idea of inclusive schooling, it is necessary to examine the term itself. It is argued that the term inclusion implies a 'bringing in' and therefore carries within it a presupposition of a centre / an ideal centre or a place worthy of being brought into. Whether this is viewed as a tightly bound spatial metaphor or a more loosely formed socially constructed space, particular patterns of prestige and privilege are identifiable. Inclusion within the

perspective can be viewed as a discursive strategy that constructs a range of positions and the rules by which the borders and limits are conceived (Graham and Slee, 2008). What is required is a making visible and a deconstruction of the centre from which the different forms of exclusion and exclusionary practices are derived. It can be said that inclusive education invites the denaturalisation of normalcy to arrive at a ground zero point from which we banish idealisations of the centre (Graham and Slee, 2008). This essentially draws on the work of Derrida (1982) who argues that there is no centre but an absence of centre for which infinite substitutions are made. Essentially a postmodern perspective, it challenges truth claims among those who attempt to attest that they have a legitimate claim on the centre. The centre is therefore contestable but not often fully contested or exposed because of the manner in which power and position function to produce discourses that function as a substitution for the centre while making claims to be the one true centre. When this view acquires legitimacy it privileges those who are aligned to the predicated social norms. Through the normalisation of these culturally specific performances particular ways of being are naturalised. It is thus that particular discourses and practices become conflated with a social imaginary centre, human essence, human nature and a whole range of tactical statements (Graham and Slee, 2008). The imperative for maintaining the centre is derived from this view that humanity needs a centre, that it needs a cohesive system. The idea that this cohesive centre privileges and has continued to privilege particular social groups is somehow decentred from this fundamental truth and in order to ensure that this is not disturbed it becomes necessary to appear to be active in the pursuit of the ideal, while at the same time doing very little to challenge the status quo.

Two imperatives for consideration arise from this position. In the first instance, it is necessary to seek an alternative approach to the underpinning philosophy which frames thinking in the field in order to create a space for difference as a point of departure for practice rather than the search for the exception or the hunt for disability (Baker, 2002). While this on its own will help, its impact will be severely limited unless accompanied by a much more systemic reworking of current thinking at a political and policy level in order to impact practice and outcomes. An essential component in the examination of inclusion is the need to make explicit and interrogate the normative assumptions that lead us to think that we can even talk of including. To do this it is necessary to deconstruct the norm (Foucault, 1977, 1980),

the construction of which has provided the context for the differentiation, categorisation and spatialisation of individuals (Foucault, 1972). Within this Foucauldian framework used by other scholars in relation to inclusion (Graham, 2006; Graham and Slee, 2008) the norm is viewed as a fiction. A fiction that attributes value to culturally specific performances (Graham and Slee, 2008) and in doing this privileges particular ways of being and stigmatises others. This is an uncomfortable perspective, challenging particular accumulations of power, privilege and forms of capital and risks the disruption of these patterns if challenged at any fundamental level. In order to understand how it functions we need to examine the manner in which relations of power circulate through discourses to define not the law but the norm so that the norm actually appropriates law like qualities which extend to a sense of inevitably, a position that precludes the notion of an alternative norm so that it functions in a hegemonic way to define one true reality (Bourdieu, 1986). This is a form of power that makes individuals subject to the discursive dividing practice that categorises the individual by marking them out by their own individuality. In education contexts, particularly with respect to SEN but not in any way exclusive to it, this results in a compartmentalisation of students, constructed primarily through psychological and SEN discourses and knowledge claims which result in the identification of a range of target groups – all of which are defined against the centre where the centre is not challenged but reproduced. In fact in the SEN field the norm acquires an additional legitimacy, functioning as it does as a statistically derived construct that serves to rank and classify with notable regularity and widespread legitimacy. What we have is on the one hand statements of desirable ways of being and statements of deficit, conceptualisations of those other than the norm. Within this centre we have the privileged notion of normal, alongside, but always within relational existence to it is the negative, deficit, exterior other (Graham and Slee, 2008).

Some scholars have focused on a much more empowering alternative to this perspective, citing the work of Derrida and Deleuze to enable a broader more open understanding of the field of enquiry. This has been a very worthwhile application of the work of the philosophers of difference to the field of inclusion and this has much more empowering potential than the more traditional trajectories of enquiry. Although, the arguments here are complex and a full explication beyond the scope of this paper,



it is possible to identify clear implications for leadership practice from this line of enquiry. Essentially what is required is a shift in perspective that takes on board the concept of a Derridian type of deconstruction with all the associated lack of closure in terms of definitions, 'the right way' and 'the best method'. The ambiguity inherent in the workings of deconstruction prevents the development of a totalizing system. This is the essence of good practice in relation to inclusion and the process whereby the reading of texts (here I include practice as texts) always involves a double reading. This always 'seeks to locate a point of otherness and opens up a discourse on the other: (Critchley cited in Allan, 2008, p. 79) thereby 'showing the flows of thought and assumptions which direct it and what it excludes' (ibid). In this way, there is always space for an alternative, the mindset is always reflective and never fixed. There is a tolerance for ambiguity which creates a natural space for a multiplicity of norms (Graham, 2006). However, this is not an easy task and it is acknowledged that it can be particularly difficult for schools where norms and uniformity so often define the way school works and where moral closure (Goffman, 1959) and (sometimes) the tyranny of the right answer/correct approach so often prevail in both the tacit and explicit assumptions that so often inform practice.

### **And furthermore**

It is possible to argue that this broader idea of inclusion and the associated the removal of barriers so that all can participate on his or her own terms is very persuasive. In practice, however, it could be viewed as a broadly utopian idea that took little account of the reality of schools in context or the extent to which schools are part of an overall state apparatus that functions to reproduce patterns of privilege in society. In this regard, it could be argued that the idea is underpinned by a benign view of power and the manner in which power is used to shape and appropriate forms of educational capital to suit the needs of dominant social groups (Bernstein, 1996; Bourdieu 1984, 1986, 1990; Brantlinger 2003; Giroux and McLaren 1989; Lareau 2003; Willis 1977, 1990 among others). Although it is derived from sources demanding a more equal society with much greater systems of equal opportunity underpinned by greater degrees of social justice, and an increasing range of legislative attempts prohibiting discrimination (Thomas and Vaughan, 2004), it can be argued that the attempts at achieving inclusion exhibit a lack of a conceptualisation of schools in the broader societal framework; a factor which presents a fundamental flaw

in the overall thinking. The extent to which schools can 'do it alone' and sort out all society's ills is widely contested (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010). The transfer of learning experience from school to the outside school setting is by no means guaranteed. The fundamental functional correspondence underpinning the desire to have schools contribute to a more inclusive world is by no means conclusive. Fundamental to the perspective underpinning this paper is that in its original iteration there were aspects of the construct that were very attractive to people who were striving to articulate and argue for a more egalitarian model of society. It called for a radical rethinking of education, a call that is still implicit in the construct. However, the extent of the radical reappraisal required became clear the more the concept was interrogated. What was needed was a fundamental rebuilding of a school system and the broader society from the core out – and this is in all probability is unlikely to happen. In the absence of this, we are left with a utopian idea that relies for its very existence on many problematic components some of which have been referred to here. What follows is clearly identifiable in educational practice in many countries. Many systems now have a proliferation of a range of initiatives, programmes and policies to support SEN students, students from ethnic minorities and students of particular social class groups; No Child Left Behind (US); Every Child Matters (UK); DEIS (Ireland). All initiatives targeted to ensure that the semblance of proactive policy and practice is identifiable while the cause/centre remains unchallenged. When, for instance, literacy initiatives and programmes targeted at particular underachieving groups fail – it has to be poor teaching, a badly designed programme, lack of parental interest and/or little home support for literacy (Freebody, 2007; Gee, 2004, 2008; Luke, 1998; Street, 1995). The search begins for another policy and programme to produce a quick fix that rarely translates into sustainable improvements in the real meaningful literacy standards of the target groups. At no point are the fundamental patterns of inequality that produce different cultural circumstances and perspectives with respect to literacy as a cultural and social practice considered (Smagorinsky, 2001). To do this threatens the status quo and those who benefit from it. Instead the naturalised centre, in this case the school type literate culture, continues to efface. It exists beyond interrogation 'a ghostly centre which eludes critical analysis and thus recognition of the power relations embodied within notions of normalcy which exert influence over other ways of being' (Graham and Slee, 2008, p. 287).

### **Conclusion: Implications for school leadership?**

In the Irish context there have been considerable developments in relation to the manner in which schools support the diversity in the student population in recent years (Drudy, 2009). Notwithstanding this work, there are many exclusionary factors embedded in systems, structures and practices leading directly to the marginalisation, non-recognition and 'othering' of certain groups of students in schools (O' Higgins et al, 2010). Bernstein's reference to the stratifying function of social class in education can be extended, within the debate around inclusive schooling, to a range of other cultural and socially constructed categories that penetrate schools so that patterns of domination are reconstructed and reproduced within and through education which, while following a nominally inclusive policy trajectory, continues to privilege the centre. This pathway will most likely continue to view difference in terms of its distance from the centre thereby ensuring that the range of diversity within the student population remains fragmented and marginalised. When the habitus and hegemony (Bourdieu, 1986) of the dominant and the privileges that ensue are not challenged they continue to be reaffirmed. Similarly when key systems such as education continue to seek out and label difference, the power of the norm is re-established. Leadership is central to changing the model, articulating alternatives and moving closer to a more inclusive society. This begs two key questions; what leadership and where is leadership needed? It is now widely recognised that schools alone cannot solve the problems of society. What is clearly required is leadership at a societal/ governmental level committed to the broad values of an equal society. However, education, as a very significant component of state systems and economic apparatuses occupies a central role in the future development of societies. Some argue that its power is derived from its presence as one of the last remaining spaces for public discourse (Fielding and Moss, 2011). If this is the case, all is not lost and education retains a powerful potential to shape change at a societal level. This is an added imperative to ensure high quality leadership within the sector. But how can one school leader in one school make a difference to the overall bigger picture? In dealing with this issue, articulating different models of leadership is sometimes the focus of scholarship. This can be worthwhile because it provides a range of perspectives on school leadership that can enrich and inform improved practice. There is another more critical dimension to this field of enquiry; it is possible to produce scholarship relating

to the manner in which leadership functions with negative consequences by highlighting the impact of some practices, at local school level, which contribute to patterns of exclusion in individual schools – a focus on what is sometimes called the darker side of leadership practice. In this way particular aspects of practice can be overtly challenged by scholarship in order to deliver a better outcome for all students. In Ireland, for example, the practice of overt and covert selection of certain types of students and the resulting commodification of children leading directly to patterns of ‘chosen and unchosen’ schools (Mathews, 2010, p. 107) has existed for years. The patterns of practice contributing to this reproduction of privilege are not accidental requiring very specific and distributed patterns of leadership in order to ensure that it functions in the interest of dominant/middle class groups. The manner in which students are assigned to ability groups in streamed/ banded classes, sometimes at very young ages (8 or 9 in some disadvantage primary schools), also requires the specific action on the part of school leadership at many levels (McGillacuddy, 2005). This type of leadership practice which, although localised, is not exceptional and is repeated in a range of contexts with the result that these forms of practice collectively contribute to school cultures and patterns of discourse within which exclusion prevails and is justified. Not enough has been done at the level of the state, the profession itself or the academy to challenge this type of practice and meanwhile the asymmetrical pattern in the distribution of the benefits of education persist.

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