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1. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: AN ENIGMA OF 'WICKED' PROPORTIONS

Introduction

Inclusive education, a seemingly simple term that belies the issues and controversies that have ensued over the decades since its entrance into educational vernacular in the last decades of the 20th century. This came almost 25 years ago when the Salamanca Statement lay at the feet of nations globally a Framework for Action to promote the notion that all students should access an inclusive education within their local schools, regardless of ability (UNESCO, 1994). Ainscow and César (2006) declared this as being 'the most significant document that has ever appeared in the field of special education' (p. 231), given it received approval from the more than 90 nations who were part of its inception. Since the release of this statement, the construct of inclusive education has broadened to being about the education of all students, no matter sexual orientation, social status, ethnicity, religion or perceived ability/disability (Boyle & Sharma, 2015). Despite the hard work and attempted reform by advocates of inclusive education, in 25 years the construct has not been successfully or consistently implemented as the way of educating all children and young people across the globe (Boyle & Anderson, Under Revision). Regardless of this, advocacy for inclusive education remains strong in some quarters (Boyle & Anderson, Under Revision). Reasons for this are varied, but many pertain in some way to the notion that education provides so much more than just academic achievement (Armstrong, 2018). It is also widely accepted that the process of education contributes to the psychological, social/emotional, and behavioural development of the children and young people in its provision (Armstrong, Elliot, Hallett & Hallett, 2015; Oldfield, Humphrey & Hebron, 2015). This is even more important for students who are considered to sit on the margins of community, as it is this democratic access to schooling that provides these students with what it is they need to be successful within their local and wider communities;

an important discussion to be having at a time when school populations globally are becoming increasingly diverse (Schwab, Sharma & Loreman, 2018).

Given the perceived benefits of inclusive education for everyone, from the students once placed into segregated settings (Schwab, Sharma & Loreman, 2018), to the other students (Allan, 2009), teachers (Yada, Tolvanen, & Savolainen, 2018) and the wider school community (Osiname, 2018), the question must be asked – why are we not yet there? Topping's (2012) notion that inclusive education should be viewed as a journey, not a destination, could go some way to explaining why we are not 'there', as perhaps there is no destination to arrive at. However what is indisputable is that many of the world's nations have stagnated in their progress towards the provision of a fully inclusive education system (Boyle & Anderson, Under Revision), and in some systems (such as in Australia and the UK), marginalised or students with more complex educational needs are once again being separated or segregated from their peers, and rates of educational exclusion are increasing (Anderson & Boyle, 2019; Norwich & Black, 2015). Furthermore, for nations such as Italy, who espouse a fully inclusive system, cracks are beginning to appear and the once highly regarded system is facing its own challenges (Lauchlan & Fadda, 2012). Again, the discussion comes back to that persistent question. Why? Why has the implementation of inclusive education been racked with so many challenges, paradoxes, and ambiguities?

Challenges, paradoxes, and ambiguities: A brief exploration

Armstrong (2017), in his series looking at 'wicked problems' in education, chose the fields of special and inclusive education as his first topic of discussion. This was not coincidental. The term 'wicked problem', a term coined by Rittel and Webber (1973) to describe highly complex issues that do not present any obvious solutions, sits aptly in any discussion about inclusive education, for all of the reasons scrutinised within the pages of this book. However before delving into the issues presented by the contributing authors, it is worth exploring, in a more general way, some of the complex issues inclusive education raises, to understand just how 'wicked' the problem of its implementation are.

One of the biggest challenges has been the inability to define what inclusive education actually is. This ambiguity, according to Connolley and Hausstatter

(2009), has led to confusion and angst amongst those trying to plan for its implementation. Two obvious difficulties arise from this. Firstly, there is no clear understanding of what inclusive education should look like, and therefore no consistent idea of what needs to be done to achieve it. This has led to things happening under the guise of inclusive education that are, in fact, exclusive (Slee, 2018). With no clear working definition, questions around what constitutes (or not) inclusive practices are contentious. Secondly, without an unambiguous understanding or set of criteria to define what inclusive education is, measuring its success has been problematic (Loreman, 2014), and yet this is something deemed necessary within the current era of educational reform that relies on 'evidence based' approaches (Muller, 2018). What should be measured and how? Who should be measured and how? What is certain is that the current reliance by systems on data collected from high stakes testing does not provide what is needed to gauge the success (or not) of inclusive education. Researchers, policy makers and those working within the field have bandied about different ideas, however without a definitive understanding of what inclusive education is and what is actually being measured, this has proven to be a challenge that has yet to be overcome.

Another of the challenges facing inclusive education is a paradoxical one. Inclusive education is an egalitarian ideal that has sitting at its core the concepts of equity and social justice (UNICEF, 2013), yet the global political zeitgeist, which dictates the direction of all educational reform, is one that upholds and adheres to neo-liberal principles (Denniss, 2018). Choice, accountability, and standardisation are all terms that are now commonplace in discussions about educational reform, even though they sit somewhat counter intuitively to the values of equity and social justice. These neo-liberal principles presume an equal starting place, where everyone has the same access to educational opportunities and outcomes, and responsibility for success is placed upon the individuals involved (see Mounk, 2018 for a discussion on individual responsibility). Reality however provides a very different story. Inequality has always existed and it is a growing phenomenon (Niesche & Keddie, 2016), with renowned English businessman Tim Smit describing it (along with poverty) as one of the 'greatest issues of the day' (2016, p. 163). While here is not the place for a detailed discussion about global inequality, it follows that the children and young people who access education are not doing it from an equal

starting point. Therefore, a system built around this premise is going to face difficulties when considering its success (or not) through an equity and social justice, or inclusive education, lens. In this sense, education systems can be viewed as reproducing societies class systems (Slee, 2018; Friere, 2005), where some will thrive while others will fail (Artiles, 2003). In a world where exclusion is a social phenomenon, part of almost every society (Slee, 2018), this is perhaps not surprising.

This brings the discussion to another challenge for inclusive education - the question of whether or not schools should be laden with the responsibility of challenging what are engrained and exclusionary societal structures (Bregman, 2017; Apple, 2015). It is schools to which this job has fallen, although this was not the original intent of those advocating for inclusive education. Rather, inclusive education, whatever definition it is operating within, is about systemic reform. The Salamanca Statement (1994) recognised this - "education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs" (p. viii) - yet many governments, in the ensuing years since, have placed the responsibility for the implementation of inclusive education at the feet of schools (Thomson, Lingard & Wrigley, 2012). While schools are at the coalface of educational delivery and absolutely have a role to play in the development and enactment of inclusive practices, it cannot be done successfully without systemic reform. Otherwise, students for whom the system was not originally designed and established (see Connell, 1980, for an interesting discussion on the history of schooling), are at risk of being made to fit the system, rather than the system being flexible and malleable enough to meet the needs of every individual student. This raises the challenges of providing relevant curriculum and pedagogy (the what and how), resourcing (the who), and facilities (the where), that ensure access for all students.

The issues presented in this chapter (albeit briefly) demonstrate the breadth and complexity of the challenges, paradoxes, and ambiguities that inclusive education has encountered for the duration of its journey, and continues to face as its very existence and worth is questioned and challenged by many, including practitioners, researchers, and policy makers (Boyle & Anderson, Under Revision; Slee, 2018). It is perhaps unsurprising then to find that many nations have stagnated in their

progress towards fully inclusive systems, and for some, the number of students accessing education in separate or segregated facilities is on the increase, once again (Boyle & Anderson, Under Revision). This is happening not only through traditional ‘special school’ or ‘special education unit’ service provisions, but also as a result of the increasing number of selective public schools, as exist in the UK and Australia (Slee, 2018), and the increase in numbers of students being home schooled (English, 2019). Paradoxically, this is all occurring under the umbrella of inclusive education, as it remains within the pages of these nations educational policies (Slee, 2018).

Armstrong’s (2017) assertion that inclusive education is a ‘wicked problem’ would be difficult to challenge, particularly when viewed as an educational construct that is struggling to exist within current the political, social and cultural climate. Armstrong (2017) concludes his paper with these words:

> (P)rogressive initiatives to address today’s wicked problems in special and inclusive education are unlikely to make headway without addressing the underpinning beliefs and behavioural motivations – as well as political forces – which currently sustain them. Change it seems cannot be unidimensional to succeed in schools but must be adopted across the political, social, cultural, psychological and behavioural dimensions which make up the everyday, routine fabric of complex educational institutions. (p. 5).

It is indisputable that any solutions to resolve the myriad of challenges, paradoxes, and ambiguities that exist within inclusive education are going to be just as complex as the problems themselves. But this does not mean solutions should not be sought. To find a starting place, the problems need to be acknowledged, then understood in a deep and coherent way, for without this progress in the right direction will not be made. This book is an attempt to add to the discourse of inclusive education, by engaging a genuine and honest discussion about some of the current global issues and controversies surrounding the construct, and how, if at all, inclusive education can move on from these.

Interrogating inclusion

This book explores inclusive education from different perspectives through three distinct, but related, sections. The first looks at the some of the big questions currently missing from the

educational discourse through a philosophical lens – what is ‘inclusive education’ in the current climate, and what does this mean for those who are leading its charge? The second section interrogates aspects of why inclusive education has not become the prevailing model of education delivery, despite decades of it being at the forefront of educational policy and rhetoric. The book concludes with a look at what is happening in schools themselves, where much of the responsibility (rightly or not) for enacting inclusive practices has been placed. Its design allows readers to dip into particular sections, or to read it from beginning to end, with each chapter being a complete discussion in itself.

Section One begins with a chapter that provides a provocative discussion on what constitutes ‘good’ education in an era of competition and inequity. Drawing from philosophers (such as Plato and Socrates) and educational theorists (such as Dewey, Freire, Apple), Anderson and Boyle pose challenging questions which invite the reader to rethink the value and purpose of education, and its ability to be an agent of social change. More importantly, the authors appeal for a reconsideration of the purpose of schooling in a time of increasing inequality, and for a reengagement with the debate about what ‘good’ education should look like in today’s world.

In Chapter Three Anderson and Boyle continue the critical discussion of the notion of good education by analysing how neo-liberalism has impacted education. Biesta’s three-domain model of educational purpose guides their endeavor to disentangle the complexities of what it means to provide ‘good’ education for *all*. They contend that the educational discourse evident in school policies, with its sole focus on effective instruction that places strong emphasis on evidence and practices that work and bring about measurable outcomes, is problematic as it detracts our attention from questions such as “*what* are students learning?” and “*why* are they learning?” and “*who* are they learning it from?” The authors conclude that inclusive education holds firm promise for bridging the achievement gap between students, and thereby contributing to fairness and equity in education.

The final chapter in this section considers the challenges encountered by school leaders committed to serve inclusion in a neo-liberal education system where high stakes assessment, ability grouping and exclusionary practices are the prevailing phenomena. Mac Ruairc’s proposition is for “leadership practice to be reimagined” in the framework of cultural politics. If leaders view themselves and their staff as cultural workers constantly questioning and reflecting on their practice with the consideration that social conditions reproduce barriers and inequality in their schools, they will lead transformative action framed by the “politics of

recognition” of difference, where hearts and minds need are synchronized with the vision of fair and inclusive schools.

Section Two commences with a discussion that challenges the notion supported by passionate advocates of full inclusion. Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar & Hallendeck suggest that if inclusion is to be redefined with greater clarity, then there is need to abandon the binary between ‘all’ and ‘not-all’, thereby avoiding self-defeating statements that present a threat to the ideology of inclusion itself. The authors interrogate nine paths to full inclusion, from the dilemma of who is to be included, to the economic cost of inclusion, to the impact inclusive education has had on the field of special education. The authors declare their support for partial inclusion as a moral and ethical obligation, and as a realistic way forward for teaching all students with disabilities within the general school.

In the next chapter, Waitoller uses his previous work on a three-dimensional definition of inclusive education to frame the discussion around what inclusive education is. The definition identifies the mission of inclusive education as a movement as being i). to examine the distribution of opportunities for access and participation, ii). the recognition of diversity in content, pedagogy and assessment, and iii). the representation of marginalised groups in decision-making in education contexts and beyond. The author critically analyses how inclusive education is currently materialised in the context of neoliberalism, perpetuating injustice and inequity, and puts forward a framework to understand why this is, and how to move inclusion forward.

Chapter Seven focusses on whether the definition, assessment and intervention for students with dyslexia may disadvantage other students with reading difficulties who may not get the support they require in an inclusive environment. Elliot argues against cognitive evaluations, which are widely applied and create diagnostic categories that distinguish between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students by validating a diagnosis of dyslexia. The author responds to the controversy surrounding the value of diagnostic labels within inclusive education by strongly endorsing the RTI (Response to Intervention) model, which offers systemic support in response to need rather than to a label. Elliot recognises the need for students with dyslexia to

receive appropriate instruction, but is concerned with the education for all other students who do not meet the criteria for a dyslexia diagnosis.

Boyle, Anderson and Allen begin Section Three with a discussion on teacher attitudes towards inclusion, and the critical role this plays in the successful implementation (or not) of inclusive practices. The authors examine factors which exert major influence on whether teachers develop positive or negative attitudes towards inclusion, and argue that teacher attitudes should be conceptualized, measured and evaluated as one of the critical aspects in a whole-school approach to the sustainable development of an inclusive school culture.

In Chapter Nine Page and Jones draw from recent research, and calls from politicians urging schools and teachers to enforce strict discipline methods as a means to improve student outcomes, to express their timely concern about the direction of classroom management in the Australian landscape. They point to the critical disconnection between their own philosophy and principles, and the classroom management practices pre-service teachers observe in their professional experience placements. The authors propose an alternative model for understanding and teaching classroom management that is aligned with a holistic conceptualization of classroom management that acknowledges both classroom ecologies and student need.

Mays, Jindal-Snape and Boyle present Chapter Ten with a look at issues surrounding the transitions of students with additional support needs across the different stages of schooling and into post-school life. The authors highlight the importance of understanding interpersonal challenges for each student during the transition process, not just the academic ones, and as such emphasise the need for a "whole-person" approach that will respect the student's preferences, peer affiliations and needs. The authors propose a multi-level systemic approach which encompasses the perspective/voice of students, alongside a number of other measures that teachers can use to prepare students for their transitions, from a strengths-based viewpoint.

In Chapter Eleven, Mavropoulou, Railey and Campbell present a discussion about the important role peers play in the successful experiences of students with ASD in inclusive school settings. The authors interrogate the research in this field and argue

that poor peer relationships can have significant consequences for students with ASD, resulting in social isolation, loneliness and serious cases of bullying. Peer-mediated interventions, peer-awareness programs, school-wide bullying programs, and teacher understanding are unpacked and presented as methods that, when used together, can work to support successful peer relationships for students with ASD, which improves both social and academic outcomes for these students.

The next chapter, by Allen, Boyle and Lachlan, introduces the notion that a multi-systemic approach to the instruction of social skills will promote authentic social inclusion, especially for students on the autism spectrum who experience bullying and persisting difficulties in their social relationships, particularly at school. The central tenet of this approach is that individuals who sit in multiple layers around the individual student, such as peers, teachers, principals and parents, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining strong and positive social relationships, which in turn help build an atmosphere of belonging and connectedness in a mainstream school context.

The penultimate chapter presents a new model of teaching literacy (Integrated Group Reading), which offers support to Year 1 students grappling with learning to read. This model allows the delivery of support to be provided in the main by the classroom teacher within the context of the classroom and is therefore aligned with inclusive values and inclusive pedagogies. A key implication of this approach is that it contributes to professional development for inclusion as it equips teachers with advanced skills to support all students in their classes who have not mastered reading; the development of quality teaching practices that meet the needs of all students within the classroom is effective inclusive teaching.

Finally, Gaintza, Darretxe and Boyle present an analysis of the multi-tiered education system in the Basque country, Spain, that has been designed to cater for the needs of diverse students. Schools operate in an inclusive framework, offering support within the broad general curriculum through the implementation of *ordinary specific measures* for students who need supplementary instruction. The authors engage in a critical discussion about this approach in light of the increasing numbers of students being enrolled in special education units, which they argue is a reflection

on the gap in the Basque county's education policy that favours alternative forms of schooling for students with special education needs.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is sitting precariously within educational policies globally. There are some who believe that inclusive education 'is dead' as it has exposed itself to be an unattainable ideal (Imray & Colley, 2017, p. 1). Others, however, are still agitating for change, big change, that will enable education systems to deliver an education to all students, in an obtainable, inclusive way. Both of these viewpoints are argued in the pages ahead, providing the reader with opinions and ideas that may challenge, inspire or consolidate what it is they have come to this book with.

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