One Nation Globalization and Inclusive Education

Derrick Armstrong, Ilektra Spandagou, and Ann Cheryl Armstrong

Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney

Abstract
This paper explores the development of inclusive education and questions what the future of inclusion is in the context of one nation globalisation. Inclusive education as a late modernity reform project is exemplified in the call for ‘Education for All’. Despite the simplicity of its message, inclusion is highly contestable. We argue in this paper that the global pressures towards common policy agendas result from state reformation within the context of economic globalisation. However, it is also argued that global trends are significantly mediated through the contested social relations within local contexts. In other words, what inclusion is, what an inclusive education system looks like and who benefits from inclusion are questions that cannot be answered outside the context of a new world order.

Inclusion is contested within and across educational systems and its implementation is problematic both in the countries of the North and of the South. Some of these contradictions are discussed in this paper providing an analysis of national and international policy. In the countries of the North inclusion takes different forms, for example encompassing an ever expanding understanding of ‘diversity’ or as a new form of special education. Despite the differences in the ways that inclusion is defined, its effectiveness is closely related to managing students by minimising disruption in regular classrooms and by regulating ‘failure’ within the education systems. The second part of the paper discusses the significance of inclusive education for the countries of the South. It is argued that post-colonial social identities, economic development and local ‘voices’ are contested in the introduction of policies supported and financed by international organisations.

This paper recognises the contested nature of inclusion in the context of one nation globalisation and it sees the future of inclusion as no different from its radical beginnings; inclusion continues to be an opportunity in education and society in general to identify and challenge discrimination and exclusion at an international, national and local level.
Introduction
Inclusion is increasingly becoming a significant policy agenda in developing as well as in developed countries. It is an agenda that is being advanced in particular by international agencies such as the United Nations and UNESCO, the World Bank and the UK’s Department for International Development. Yet, the reality is that the idea of ‘inclusion’ is a doctrine that has been exported from the developed countries of the North and thrust upon education systems in developing countries of the South. Nor do these different agencies use the term in same ways: different usages reflect the contested nature not simply of inclusive education as a policy but of wider political contestations across the post-colonial political landscape.

Even in the countries of the North, the meaning of ‘inclusion’ is by no means clear and perhaps conveniently blurs the edges of social policy with a feel-good rhetoric that no one could be opposed to. What does it really mean to have an education system that is ‘inclusive’? Who is thought to be in need of inclusion and why? If education should be inclusive, then what practices is it contesting, what common values is it advocating, and by what criteria should its successes be judged? In this paper we will argue that the significance of international policies and interventions promoting the theme of ‘inclusive education’ must be seen within the context of a new world order. The introduction of these policies to education systems both in the new Europe and in the ‘developing countries’ of post colonial globalisation is underpinned by a complex and contested process of social change. While social policy is dominated by the rhetoric of inclusion, the reality for many remains one of exclusion and the panacea of ‘inclusion’ masks many sins.

Inclusion and the Politics of Disability
In the countries of Europe, North America and Australasia the concept of special educational needs is only marginally related to a notion of ‘impairment’. Few children identified as having ‘special educational needs’ would understand their experiences in terms of an impairment. Yet the politics of disability offer significant insights into an understanding of the application of such labels, the social construction of identities as there is little overlap
between educational categories of special education need and generally much more narrow categories of disability or impairment used in the management of resources and identities in the adult world.

None the less the label of special educational needs plays a significant role in extending to a much greater number of people an educational rationale for failure within the educational system and the subsequent social marginalisation and denial of opportunities that follows for the unsuccessful within the ordinary school system. In this way the disability discourse is seen by Fulcher (1989) to deflecting attention

From the fact that it is failure in the education apparatus by those whose concern it should be to provide an inclusive curriculum, and to provide teachers with a sense of competence in such a curriculum, which constructs the politics of integration.

(Fulcher, 1989, p. 276)

Special educational needs is also a concept that is embedded in the trinity of social class, gender and race. The importance of these factors and indeed the social processes implicated in their application, have been well described by sociologists from at least the 1970s onwards (for example, Tomlinson, 1981, 1982). Yet the labels continue to obfuscate the intersection and operation of these factors as signifiers of exclusion in the daily decision-making of policy makers and practitioners across the world. As many writers have argued it is only by deconstructing these wider social relationships that insight is possible into the role of special educational needs as a discourse of power and its abuses.

In the developed world, the idea of ‘inclusive education’ is one that has challenged the traditional view and role of special education. This challenge has been significantly driven by the disabled people’s movement in the UK, USA and in Europe. It has fundamentally questioned eugenicist policies and practices that have promoted segregation and ‘human improvement’, including more recent derivations of this philosophy that have been embedded in a rhetoric of humanitarianism and social welfare. In place of eugenics, the disability movement has advanced a model of ‘inclusive education’ that is linked to a broader campaign for social justice and human rights.
That policy in this area continues to be contested is evident in the experience of a number of developed countries. In the UK, for example, the policy of inclusion has become a central plank of government reform since 1997. On the other hand, the radical ideas about social justice that characterised the development of inclusion as a political agitation by the disabled people’s movement have largely been lost within the technical approaches to inclusive education. These approaches framed those policy applications in the UK in the narrower terms of ‘school improvement’, diversity of provision for different needs and academic achievement (Armstrong, 2005).

In Greece, the renaming of ‘special classes’ to ‘inclusive classes’ was one of the ways that education policy responded to the impetus of inclusion (Law 2817/2000). In the same legislation that introduced the name of ‘inclusive classes’, a complex bureaucratic assessment and evaluation process for the identification of students with a disability was put into place. This process reinforced the dominance of the ‘medical model’ in the education system by requiring children and young people to be ‘labelled’ with one of the recognised categories of disability before educational provision in the form of resources, additional support and instructional differentiation could become available. In practice, inclusive classes have continued in most cases to perform their role as ‘withdrawn rooms’ were students spend significant periods of their school time. This model ‘regulates’ the management of a part of the school population and “avoids ‘contaminating’ the mainstream educational praxis with ‘special education intervention or differentiation’” (Zoniou-Sideri, Deropoulou-Derou, Karagianni, & Spandagou, 2006, p. 285).

The dominance of a ‘deficit model’ in the Greek context is reinforced by in the new Law. Despite the recognition that ‘disability constitutes a natural part of the human condition’ (Law 3699/2008, article 1, point 1), the dominance of a deficit approach is evident in the statement that “the type and degree of special educational needs defines the form, kind and category of Special Education provision” (Law 3699/2008, article 2, point 1).

In the developing world as in the developed world inclusive education is used in quite different ways that mean different things. Sometimes it is framed in terms of social justice, such as where it is directly linked to the UNESCO’s ‘Education For All’ policy. In this
reading an advocacy position is at the heart of the inclusive model. Translated into particular national settings within the developing world, inclusive education is frequently in practice useful as a policy option that is less resource intensive than other approaches to the provision of services for disabled children. It is a discourse that has also arisen in the context of exceptionally low achievement and the failure of educational systems to adequately address the needs of the majority of a country’s population. In this respect it mirrors the role of special educational discourses (and their colourful terminologies) in Europe and North America from the late eighteenth century onwards as those systems sought to manage the ‘flotsom and jetsom’ created by a system of mass schooling. This places the notion of inclusion in highly contested political territory.

The Politics of Inclusive Education

To appreciate the complex history that underpins the development of inclusive education, as both a political and a policy/practice discourse, a discussion of the meaning and significance of ‘inclusion’ in global educational practice today must be made concrete. For instance, in the newly globalizing discourse of inclusion, its radical humanistic philosophical premises should be placed in the more sobering context of the intersection between colonial histories and post-colonial contexts of countries in the developed and developing world. This can take place, for example, by contrasting its rhetorical stance towards social cohesion with its practical limitations, or even complicity, in the management of diversity and in particular racial and cultural diversity in the interests of social hegemony, both nationally and internationally.

Similarly, the technological advances of the 21st century, the globalisation of economic markets and the penetration of ‘first world’ knowledge and policy solutions into the developing world all may be understood as spreading an evangelical belief in the inclusion of diversity. Alternatively globalisation and its impact on conceptualisations of inclusion may be understood in terms of a Habermasian technical rationalism which has separated social practice from ethical thinking in the management of global social inequality. Developing country economies are starved of investment, historically constrained (internally as well as externally) by the baggage of colonialism, and economically disenfranchised by the political
dominance of first world countries, their donor agencies and the interests of multinational companies. Their precocious position is commonly reflected in both the need to develop human capital alongside economic investment and the inability of these countries to lift themselves out of disadvantages that are structural, global and embedded in the historical and cultural legacy of colonialism. Within this context, the exhortations of first world aid agencies and international donors for countries to adopt inclusive education as a policy prescription to address system failure and individual disadvantage can seem idealistic, if not patronising and victimizing. On the other hand, the discourse of inclusive education can provide a political space for contesting the wider agenda of social injustice. Here, as for example is the case with the promotion of ‘inclusive education’ by the member states of UNESCO, there are opportunities for advancing a progressive educational agenda that goes beyond the rhetoric of exhortation and the limitations of policy borrowing from first world nations.

The Globalising Discourse of Inclusion

These contrasting agendas are evident in the competing policy frameworks that address issues of internationalization in educational policy. For instance, one of the most significant events of the 21st century was the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly in 13 December 2006 of the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities. On the 3rd of May 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol entered into force. The Convention does not explicitly define disability but it recognizes that:

\[
\text{disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006, p. 1).}
\]

In the area of education, the Convention, moves even further than the international development targets for education set out in the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities which proposed that:
States should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system.

(United Nations 1993: Rule 6)

The Article 24 on Education of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities state that

States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning

(UN, 2006, p. 16, emphasis added)

In calling the States Parties to ensure that “effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion” (UN, 2006, p. 17), the Convention reinforces the centrality of inclusion in educational debates 22 years after the Salamanca Statement.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), recognising the uniqueness of each child and their fundamental human right to education, declared that ‘[i]nclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the exercise and enjoyment of human rights’ (p. 11). The Statement is supported by a Framework for Action which strongly supports schools having a child-centred pedagogy supporting all children. This Framework suggests that education systems must become inclusive by catering for diversity and special needs, thus creating opportunities for genuine equalisation of opportunity. It begins with the premise that differences are a normal part of life and therefore learning should be adapted to cater to those differences, rather than trying to insist that children fit into a perceived ‘norm’. As such, Governments have been asked to improve their education systems as a priority by adopting laws and policies which support the principles of inclusivity. The Salamanca Statement strongly advocates that:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an
effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system.

(UNESCO, 1994, p. 3)

However, other considerations may have an equal if not greater bearing upon policy formulation and implementation in practice. For example, the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 1993, ‘Rule 6 of 22’) recognised that special schools may have to be considered where ordinary schools have not be able to make adequate provisions. The focus on an ‘inclusive education system’ of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities questions the ‘necessity’ of a segregated special education system. The tensions between an education system ‘consistent with the goal of full inclusion’ and a ‘deficit approach’ to education provision, in which the ‘type and severity’ of disability becomes the primary measure of access to a regular setting are more than obvious.

However, these tensions may play out differently in developed and developing countries. For example, the World Bank, which works in conjunction with the United Nations to provide loans to developing countries, has argued in favour of inclusion, justifying this position thus:

If segregated special education is to be provided for all children with special educational needs, the cost will be enormous and prohibitive for all developing countries. If integrated in-class provision with a support teacher system is envisaged for the vast majority of children with special educational needs, then the additional costs can be marginal, if not negligible.

(Lynch, 1994, p. 29)

The financial desirability of inclusion is of great importance, since, as Tomlinson argued in 1982, “it certainly will be cheaper to educate children with special needs in ordinary rather than special schools” (p. 174). It is not only disabled people who are to be included in this category (Des Santos, 2001). For the most part, these are children who are experiencing difficulties with learning, rather than children with physical, sensory or learning impairments. The cost-effectiveness aspect of inclusive education is reiterated in the international organisations policy and documents (Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 2005). In UNESCO’s (2005) Guidelines for Inclusion, the reference to the cost-effectiveness of inclusive education is
supplemented with concerns about the privatisation of inclusive education which ‘may in turn lead to ‘cost-cutting’ in areas that are essential for educational access for all’ (p. 18).

Yet, increasingly the discourse of special education is being drawn upon to frame discussions and policy concerning educational failure. This illustrates a dilemma, not restricted to developing countries, but acutely experienced in these settings. On the one hand, the need for improved and targeted learning support coupled with the training of teachers, particularly in the mainstream sector, to work effectively with children with a range of special educational needs is very evident. On the other hand, the language of special education can itself impede an analysis of more deep-seated problems in respect of both funding and policy for improving the quality of education for all children. The reality is that the goals of equity and equality of opportunity remain distant for many people in the developing world. For example, those stricken by poverty often experience academic deceleration and acquire special educational needs as they pass through the school system, leading to their eventual exclusion from those sections of the school system that offer the greatest prospects for upward social mobility (UNESCO, 1996).

For instance, the past 50 years has seen significant change in the countries of the Eastern Caribbean states with most of them gaining political independence, mostly from Britain, and thus experiencing tremendous change in their social and economic standing. Due to the collapse of the banana industry, struggling economies also translated into changing demographics where families became ‘disjointed’ with mothers and fathers leaving through the ‘front door’ or the ‘back door’ to earn a living in the US. The emergence of ‘barrel children’, children who are rolled backwards and forwards between the Caribbean and developed countries, both for socio-economic and family needs, introduced a new dimension to children with special needs. Also, an increase in the number of persons with HIV AIDS, translated into an emerging school age population with the condition. These countries were not prepared for such rapidly changing social and economic circumstances.

Also, within the last 18 years governments in the countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have been building upon an international momentum which supports and promotes policies of education for all (UNESCO, 1990, 2000, 2001).
Developments in special education and more recently inclusion have not been entirely planned and very often aid was sought from diverse organizations based on the donor policies of developed countries rather than a sound analysis of the needs of recipient countries. Special educational services and provision developed fairly arbitrarily within these islands. Added to this already complex situation, there are the rapid technological advances of the 21st century, the globalization of economic markets and the penetration of ‘first world’ knowledge and policy solutions into the developing world. These factors have given rise to debates about special education being located within the context of more general concerns around the themes of ‘social inclusion’ and ‘education for all’, in significant part arising from the ‘development’ policies of first world states.

Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued that a view of global cosmopolitanism has emerged founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance and free-market forces of competition. It is a cosmopolitanism that celebrates a world of plural cultures as it moves swiftly and selectively from one island of prosperity to another, ‘paying conspicuously less attention to the persistent inequality and immiseration produced by such unequal and uneven development’ (xiv). This ‘one-nation’ globalisation is premised upon the assimilation of difference by an over-riding imperative of technologically driven ‘modernisation’. This imperative, which has political and moral as well as economic dimensions, crosses boundaries that are both geographic and cultural. The modernisation project of New Labour in the reconstruction of the socio-economic landscape of Britain is at one with the post-colonial project by which developing countries are increasingly incorporated into the globalised world of free-trade and institutional homogeneity under the celebratory slogan of the inclusion of diversity. Yet in a most important sense globalisation necessarily begins at home; in other words, with ‘the difference within’. It is defined by the boundaries it places around inclusion; by the homogeneity of its view of diversity. Diversity is celebrated where it extends the reach of cultural dominance. Elsewhere, the opportunity to voice a different experience, a different reality, is closed down as is the case with indigenous peoples whose land has been torn from them and whose cultures have been ridiculed, brutalised and reconstituted by colonial fantasies.
One Nation Globalization and Inclusive Education

Yet, implicit in much of the international policy on inclusion is an assumption that participation in education should be premised on the voices of young people being heard. This assumption, which has come to be accepted wisdom, is one that has arisen in a largely first-world literature. Indeed it is an idea that is largely discontented, coming from a very different tradition to the Freirian notion of speaking against the colonizing silence of political domination that has been so powerful in the decolonization struggles of the late twentieth century. Little attention has been given in the literature on children’s voices, a largely European and North American literature, to the ways in which participation is culturally specified through rites of passage and transition and to the role and meaning of ‘voice’ in this process.

However, the nature of research and development collaborations between special educators from first world countries and developing countries, especially where the former are acting as change-agents often takes for granted concepts such as ‘equity’, ‘social justice’ and ‘human rights’ and in doing so abstracts them from the specific historical and cultural traditions of developing countries. Ironically, these concepts, which are introduced as guiding principles of education reform, mask the unequal and dependency promoting relationship between change-oriented development interventions sponsored by outside funding agencies and the recipients of such programmes. Thus, when policies on inclusive education are abstracted from the broader social context within which they are situated it is unlikely that they will be effective. More importantly, there is also a danger of limiting the very real possibilities for sharing experiences and educational thinking that do exist but which are dependent upon a very different notion of collaboration.

Conclusion

Many of the issues which have been identified in this paper have arisen as a result of a legacy of the economic inequalities which developing countries have to manage in providing educational services. These inequalities are located in the colonial heritage of developing countries and in their continuing economic subordination to the interests of the first-world nations. More recently, there have been international attempts to raise the profile of inclusive inclusion as a policy priority but the reality for developing countries is often one in which the
international rhetoric of inclusion is experienced, ironically, as reinforcing the exclusion of entire peoples from economic and social opportunities. In the same way, inclusion in the countries of the North is realised as another education reform within the market forces that underpin the ideology of school performance and measurable outcomes.

From the discussion of the contradictions surrounding inclusion in the last twenty years or so, it becomes apparent that we need to retrace the development of inclusion back to the radical beginnings of the inclusion movement. As the important observation by Len Barton (2001, pp. 10-11) emphasises

...inclusive education is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, that of the realisation of an inclusive society. Thus, those who claim to a commitment to inclusive education are always implicated in challenging discriminatory, exclusionary barriers and contributing to the struggles for an inclusive society.
References