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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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ABSTRACT

While many distinctions between 'special' and 'inclusive' education have been made and continue to be forcefully debated, the two concepts remain strongly evident in policy and practice in many countries. This paper discusses the interrelated history of these concepts. It explores how conceptualisations of them have changed since Salamanca and reflects on whether inclusive education has, can or should replace special education. It considers the extent to which 'special' and 'inclusive' education are understood as the same or different today. The paper argues for a clear a distinction to be made between how special educators can work in support of inclusive education and the task of inclusive education which addresses the barriers to participation faced by members of marginalised groups.

Introduction

The 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, concluded with what is now commonly known as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994). The Statement called upon governments and the international community to endorse and prioritise inclusive education policy and practice, and to work together to support and expand provision. Twenty five years on, it is time to reflect the progress that has been made.

First, by recognising that children with special educational needs should be educated within regular or, as it is called in some countries, mainstream education systems, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) issued a global challenge to the very potent and commonly held idea that children with special educational needs do not belong in mainstream schools or general education systems. A product of its time, the Statement was predicated on the idea that:

> regular schools … 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 cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (ix)

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To this end, Salamanca promoted a rights-based anti-discriminatory stance that stipulated 'a child with a disability should attend the neighborhood school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability' (17).

In addition, it linked the education of children with special needs to the 'Education for All' (EFA) movement that had been launched at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand by recognising 'the necessity and urgency of providing education for all children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system' (viii).

Notably, Salamanca focused the world's attention on the many ways in which children identified as having special educational needs have been historically and, in some places, legally excluded from mainstream or regular education systems. By recognising that all children should be educated within an inclusive education system, Salamanca challenged the idea that different forms of provision for different types of learners were needed as the way to provide for all.

Although Salamanca's rights-based anti-discriminatory stance was primarily in support of learners with special needs, the idea of an inclusive educational system, where all were welcome and no one was excluded, had broad appeal. Over time, the conceptualisation of inclusive education was broadened to encompass anyone who might be excluded from or have limited access to the general educational system within a country. In this way Salamanca foreshadowed current ideas of inclusive education as being about everyone.

Thus the achievement of Salamanca has been three-fold. It challenged the idea that some children do not belong in regular or mainstream schools; it called into question the structures of schooling that rely on different forms of provision for different types of learners; and it introduced the idea of inclusive education to the wider education community.

Accordingly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for education, SDG 4 aims to *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.* Additionally, the Brussels Declaration that followed the 2018 Global Education Meeting clearly embraced this expanded idea of inclusion in education by defining 1it

> as the right to safe, quality education and learning throughout life … .that requires particular attention be given to those in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons whether as a result of conflict or natural disaster. (UNESCO 2018, 2)

The concept of inclusive education promoted by Salamanca and its call for an education system that is responsive to diverse needs now has global reach. It underpins today's international evaluations of the disparities in educational systems – not only in terms of who has access to them, but also in terms of the quality of education provided. Consequently, we have a much clearer understanding of the extent to which almost all children are included, excluded or marginalised within education systems.

However, it has not been smooth sailing. While every country can point to examples of good quality inclusive practice, there are also examples where practice is less well developed or non-existent. Accounting for these variabilities is not clear cut. There are disagreements about how to provide for everyone in an inclusive education system. Notably there

are debates about the extent to which a parallel system of special needs education is a problem or a solution to the challenge of providing an equitable education for diverse groups of learners.

This paper considers how distinctions between special and inclusive education are inextricably linked to each other. It argues that distinguishing between the two concepts is essential to future developments that support a good quality education for everyone and calls for a post-Salamanca decoupling of inclusive education from special education on the grounds that the twenty-first century challenge of SDG 4 requires renewed engagement with the contested conceptual problems associated with inclusion *and* equity in education. To this end, this paper considers whether: (1) special education is a problem in need of a solution; (2) inclusive education has fulfilled its promise to provide for everyone; and (3) whether and how in some contexts, the provision of special education has contributed to the goals of inclusive education.

Is special needs education a problem in need of a solution?

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) defines special needs education as that which is designed 'to facilitate learning by individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an education programme' (UOE 2016, 10). This definitional focus on 'additional support' and 'adaptive pedagogical methods' is a hallmark of special needs education. It positions special needs education as a resource based response that is provided when individual learners require something different from or additional to what is on offer to everyone else.

Special needs?

Although different terminology is used in different national contexts, a child or young person is commonly considered to have 'special needs' if he or she has a learning difficulty and/or a disability that requires support that is additional from, or different to that which is ordinarily available to others of similar age.

Both learning difficulty and disability are umbrella terms. While there are various definitions of the term learning difficulty, it is generally understood with regard to problems associated with performing to the same standard as others in the same age group. A learning difficulty, by definition refers to some kind of barrier to learning such as problems with reading, writing spelling arithmetic, mathematics, or problem solving. These problems can have many different causes but when they interfere with performance in school, they are considered learning difficulties that sometimes lead to a designation of special needs.

Learning difficulties can include specific conditions, often considered disabilities, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or attention-deficit disorder. Accordingly, learning difficulties are considered sometimes to be *caused* by underlying disabilities: for example dyslexia can cause difficulty with reading or spelling, dyspraxia can affect handwriting and dyscalculia is associated with mathematical problem solving and arithmetic comprehension. However, it cannot be assumed that learning difficulties are caused by disabilities. While a disability refers to physical mental or sensory impairments that limit a person's

activity or ability to participate in everyday activities, there may be other reasons that learners have difficulty with reading, writing or arithmetic. It is possible that a difficulty can be created by circumstances in the life of a child or young person. If a learning difficulty is a problem associated with performing to the same standard as others in the same age group, it can be related to many situations beyond an impairment. Learners who miss out on teaching because of absence from school, or do not speak the mother tongue, or are from culturally different groups may encounter difficulties in learning but these difficulties will not be the result of an impairment.

Consequently, the concept of special needs is broad and can seem confusing. Many countries use categorical descriptions of disability to determine eligibility for special needs education, though these categories vary across time and between jurisdictions. Even in countries that do not use disability categories, some process of classification remains in place to determine eligibility for services, planning for special needs education and producing data about which learners receive services and how well they are learning.

Special needs education?

For many years in many jurisdictions, special needs education was understood as that which was provided in special schools and classes. In other words it was the *place* where special needs education occurred, separate from what was provided to everyone else. This understanding came about in part because *additional support* is defined by what is *not* generally available to all. As a resource based response that is determined by the additional resources that support learners with special needs, the definition of special needs education is tautological: the educational response to learners with special needs has been to provide special needs education.

The ISCED definition of special needs education emerged in the twentieth century as one of the means of accommodating the increasingly diverse population of students that enrolled in schools following the enforcement of compulsory school attendance laws (Grubb and Lazerson 2004). It is commonly understood as something different from or additional to that which is generally available to others of similar age. Definitions of special needs education in many jurisdictions are based on the notion that what schooling systems ordinarily provide will meet the needs of most learners, while a few at the tail ends of a normal distribution may require something additional or different. This thinking about how to accommodate difference is rooted in early twentieth century efforts to expand education and is associated with the development of other initiatives of the time, notably the development of intelligence testing, sorting of learners on the notional basis of ability, the identification of special educational need, and concomitant placement of some learners in separate special education provision. Over time, research on these efforts has 'drawn attention to the damaging effects of ability labelling on young people's learning and life chances. Yet determinist beliefs about ability continue to have currency in schools' (Hart, Drummond, and McIntyre 2014, 439) and reinforces what has been called the special education industry (Tomlinson 1982, 2017).

In today's world, the engine of education's normative centre is driven by international competition that places a premium on high academic standards and the skills thought to produce economic advantage in the marketplace. Competition between students, schools and jurisdictions rank order students (standardised achievement tests), schools (school

inspections), and the performance of jurisdictions (international comparison tests of student performance by country). Such rankings are often underpinned by 'bell-curve thinking', a term used by Fendler and Muzaffar (2008) to refer to the widespread acceptance in education of the deterministic assumption that most phenomena (e.g. intelligence, ability, performance) can be distributed according to the statistical principles of the normal curve. As Fendler and Muzaffar argue, an education system dominated by this view is inherently problematic because any normal distribution requires nearly half of what is being assessed (students, schools, jurisdictions) to be below average.

This poses a serious equity problem for schools that are more diverse than ever before in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages spoken, disability status and so forth. While it can be argued that equity demands that differentiated approaches are needed to accommodate individual differences between learners, such approaches create problems when the inherent bias within bell curve thinking produces and reinforces school structures that are designed for 'most' students on the grounds that something different can be available to 'some'. As the history of special needs education has shown, this not only pathologises difference but tends to disproportionately affect students who are members of vulnerable minority groups and are often more likely to be living in poverty than other children. Consequently, targeted responses to individual difference, such as special needs provision relies on the logic of exclusion where differentiated forms of provision for some is the process by which all are 'included', and results in a repetition of exclusion within schools (Allan 2006; Slee 2010). It is for this reason that critics of special needs education (Tomlinson 1982; 2017; Skrtic 1991; Thomas and Loxley 2001) have argued that special needs education itself is a form of exclusion.

However, special needs education reproduces exclusion because it is positioned at the margin of education's normative centre. As Youdell (2006) has argued: 'while Special Educational Needs are often located on the fringes of education, it is in this location at the boundary that Special Educational Needs acts to define and ensure the continuity of education's normative centre' (22). This structural positioning is a key barrier to inclusion and equity in education. What is missing from the critique of special needs education is a consideration of what occurs in education's normative centre. This is important because it is only when what is generally available to most learners does not meet the needs of some, that special needs arise, and additional support is thought to be needed. The extent to which a special needs education is seen to be required is when a learner's difficulty cannot be accommodated within what is ordinarily available to others of similar age. It has long been understood that special needs are an artefact of a fixed education system to which an individual must adapt. As some have argued (e.g. Ainscow 1991; Thomas and Loxley 2001; Dyson 1990), and many have shown (e.g Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Florian, Black-Hawkins, and Rouse 2017; Causton and Tracy-Bronson 2015; Oyler 2006; Thomas, Walker, and Webb 1998;), this relationship can be altered by changing the ways differences between learners are accommodated in schools.

Inclusive education: has it delivered on its promise to provide for everyone?

Commencing from questions about the efficacy of special needs education and its underlying assumptions, practices, and outcomes (Ainscow 1991; Brantlinger 1997; Skrtic 1986;

Slee 1993; Thomas and Loxley 2001; Tomlinson 1982), inclusive education offered an alternative based on a principled approach that specified local schools should provide for all learners. As an alternative approach to a placement in special needs education, inclusive education was described as process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of mainstream schools' (Booth and Ainscow 2002). In the 1990s, research on the practice of inclusive education suggested that its meaning was contextual (Katsiyannis, Conderman, and Franks 1995; O'Hanlon 1995). This idea was reflected in definitions that emphasised inclusive education as 'an *approach* to education embodying particular values' (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006, 5, emphasis added). While this distinction was helpful in differentiating inclusive education from the place where it occurred (e.g. special needs classes or schools), it did not take account of the broader policy context of educational reform that promotes competition between schools and jurisdictions as a measure of effectiveness. As previously noted, there is an inherent bias in education systems that are designed for *most* students on the grounds that something different can be provided to *some* as a means of ensuing access for all.

Today, the processes that have become associated with inclusive education are varied as are its outcomes. Consequently inclusive education is a contested concept with disagreements in the literature about how it should be defined (Göransson and Nilholm 2014; Winter and O'Raw 2010); enacted (Florian 2017) and evaluated (Loreman and Chris Forlin 2014). In addition, not everyone agrees that inclusive education is a solution to the problem of special education or that special education is a problem in need of a solution (Kauffman and Hallahan 2018), particularly when they can point to examples of so-called inclusive practice that have not produced good results (e.g. Gilmour 2018). Yet, for those who have been troubled by the structure of special needs education because of the ways that it excludes those who receive it from the educational opportunities available to others of similar age, the ideal of an inclusive educational system where everyone belongs and no one is excluded has had wide appeal within a narrow education community concerned with issues of special needs education.

Despite the contested nature of inclusive education, and the many different socio-cultural-historical contexts in which schooling occurs, use of the term has broadened over the past 25 years in recognition of disparities in education systems throughout the world. The EFA movement reaffirmed education as a human right by calling attention to these disparities and urging all countries to provide for the basic learning needs of all people. In setting out its vision for Education 2030, the 2015 World Education Forum noted:

> Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes. (UNESCO 2015, iv)

This broader view now necessitates a wider consideration of what it means to educate all children together. Such a consideration can address the limitations inherent in current approaches to inclusive education that have tended to focus on including children with disabilities in mainstream schools. However, there is considerable work to do. While inclusive education challenged the concept of special needs education as 'different from' or 'additional to' that which is provided for the majority of learners, the processes

associated with it have tended to replicate rather than replace special needs education in many situations leading some to warn that inclusive education risked becoming another name for special education (Slee and Allan 2001), and others to question whether the concept of inclusive education has outpaced practice (Artiles et al. 2006).

Another name for special education?

As a rights-based notion, inclusive education is linked to the idea of education as human right of intrinsic value to individuals, as well as a means by which other basic rights and freedoms can be achieved for individuals and society. Yet, while inclusive education signals a response to exclusion from or within education, distinctions between special and inclusive education remain inextricably linked to concerns about disability. However, the focus on disability is but a starting point for understanding inclusive education. In all jurisdictions, learners with disabilities have experienced exclusion from opportunities available to others (World Health Organization and World Bank 2011). As concern for other excluded and vulnerable learners has increased the anti-discriminatory rights-based concept of inclusive education has been extended to take account of them too.

However, while most jurisdictions support the rights-based anti-discrimination principle of inclusive education, they continue to rely on special needs practices (e.g. identification and assessment of individual need, individualised education plans (IEPs), and specialist forms of provision facilities for some learners). Yet, as discussed in the preceding section, while disabilities refer to impairments that limit a person's activity or ability to participate in everyday activities, difficulties in learning can also result from life circumstances related to many situations beyond impairment. The confounding variables of poverty, gender and minority status means that members of these groups may be disproportionately represented in disability statistics with many arguing that they are overrepresented (Artiles, Trent, and Palmer 2004; Harry and Klinger 2006; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju & Roberts, 2014), and others claiming underrepresentation (Morgan et al. 2017). Both views raise questions of educational opportunity and equity.

Clearly, the traditional mechanism for accommodating the increasing diversity of an expanding education system on the grounds that something different (for some learners) to that which is available to others of similar age (most learners) is deeply embedded. But it is problematic as an equity issue because it depends on a logic of exclusion (Allan 2006; Slee 2010) that is no longer tenable. Given the bell-curve structure of schooling, the problems and unintended consequences associated with special needs education have become a kind of Faustian pact with education's normative centre that inclusive education, with its focus on what happens in that normative centre, tries to avoid.

An idea outpaced by practice?

Over the years, research in many countries exploring school development practices in different cultural, political and social contexts has identified school and classroom practices that support and impede the development of inclusive education. Collectively, this body of work suggests that while the development of inclusive education is not easy, progress towards more inclusive education is possible everywhere (Artiles, Kozleski, and

Waitoller 2011). Today, there is a deeper understanding of the barriers and enabling factors that support the development of inclusive schooling practices for learners who have or may otherwise be identified as having special educational needs. But there is a 'practice-gap' (Florian 2017) between those that result in positive outcomes for *everyone* and those that reproduce exclusion within schools for *some*. This practice gap is partly explained by differences in how schooling is organised and who has access to it in different jurisdictions (Ainscow and Miles 2008). The state of education varies not only by world geographical region but by other important dimensions as well.

The UN Statistical Division (2011) uses a country classification that divides the world into developing countries, developed countries, and countries in transition. Within and across these regions, there are numerous interpretations of inclusive education and a great deal of variability in practice. The differences between jurisdictions reflect not only who has access to schooling, but the balance between what might be considered good and less well developed practice. Notably, while every country can point to examples of excellence, where all children from the local community are welcome to learn together in school, there are also examples where practice is less well developed. However, knowing what counts as good practice is not clear cut. An 'inclusive school' in some developed countries may be a specially designated mainstream school that is additionally resourced to include children with disabilities. In the developing world, where universal access to primary education is not assured, separate special education provision may represent the only educational opportunity available to children with disabilities. Thus, although 'special' and 'inclusive' education are different concepts, the terms are used synonymously in many countries, which in turn contributes to confusion about the distinctions between them.

However, as is the case with special needs education, inclusive education does not exist in a vacuum. The rights-based notion of inclusion co-occurs within the competitive context of standards-based reform and its focus on greater accountability for teaching, learning and raising the performance of students as measured by national and international assessments, such as PISA, and the work that is being done through the school improvement initiatives and so forth. Though some have perceived this standards-based reform agenda to be incompatible with the rights-based imperative of inclusion, debates about inclusion cannot ignore considerations of how *all* children and young people might be meaningfully included in national curricula and systems of assessment and how their participation might be judged. Consequently, the rights-based idea that all children should be able to learn together raises many questions: Can they? Do they? How? And how do we know? These questions speak to the *complicated* nature of education. They are not easily answered because they involve judgements about *complex* phenomena such as students and learning. While there have been studies that aim to address these phenomena, they have yet to be addressed through long term programmes of research that enable a comprehensive answer or sufficient theoretical development to achieve consensus on the way forward for inclusive education.

Nevertheless, research on the successful practices of teachers in inclusive schools that achieve good results for everyone, provides some clues. This work documents many examples of diverse groups of learners who are happy, well supported and learning. But there are also examples where learners are not well supported, who are isolated and not flourishing in their learning. In addition to research on school and classroom policy

and practice, there is a body of research on learner experiences of inclusive education. Some of this work focuses on what pupils have to say about their experiences and what educators can learn from listening to their voices (e.g. Messiou 2014). Another line of inquiry has documented some problems. Worryingly, there have been some recent reports that document low levels of satisfaction with the level of support that schools are providing. A recent report in the UK (O'Regan et al. 2017) found nearly half (40%) of learners *surveyed felt that they have received a below average or poor level of support from their school.* Another report on inclusion in Scotland (ENABLE Scotland 2017) found over 80% of respondents in their study of inclusion said schools are not getting it right for every child.

The difficult and complex work of inclusive education cannot dismiss the concerns of those who feel that things are not working for too many children. But when pressures mount, whether that is due to budget cuts, how resources are deployed or when what counts as the hallmark of a good education system changes, they must not be allowed to justify the claim that inclusion is a failed policy. The question is how to reduce inconsistency in practice.

It must be recognised that inclusive education assumes that the mainstream is a good place. This is driven by the belief that exclusion from or segregation within systems of education are not right because they discriminate between different types of learners. But it must also be recognised that inconsistencies in practice raise important questions about the nature and quality of provision in schools. How schools as organisations, and individual teachers within those organisations, respond to students identified as having special educational needs will be reflected in the culture of the school, including its admission, behaviour and exclusion policies and practices. It is also reflected in the approaches that teachers take and the responses that they make when students encounter difficulties in learning. Ensuring that policies of inclusive education are implemented in ways that support the social and academic well-being and progress of all students is necessary work but it is hard work. Where things are going well, schools not only have pro-inclusion policies, but they are staffed by teachers whose pedagogical practices are based on beliefs that all children can learn and they accept the responsibility for educating all children in the classes they teach.

Today, the demands for public accountability at the individual, school and system level that are used to inform judgments about 'quality' can also distort efforts to provide inclusive education for all students as those who struggle to compete are left behind in the international drive to improve standards. Seeing some learners as 'problems' or 'extra work' undermines the dignity of these learners and those who teach them. Blaming learners for the stresses of teaching is unworthy of the profession where too many teachers work tirelessly to ensure that all children are having a good experience of learning.

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, UN 2006) specifies that States shall ensure 'an inclusive education system at all levels', that 'persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education'. Recently, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) issued a General Comment (CRPD/C/GC/4, 2016) defining inclusion as:

a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide **all students** (emphasis added) of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. (§11, 4)

While the reference to *all students* is clearly intended to signal the inclusion of students with disabilities, it also reminds us that disability is a starting point for understanding inclusive education. The question is, how can all learners receive the support they need without perpetuating the problem of marginalisation that can occur by treating them differently to others of similar age? In answering this question, the practical problem of special needs education and the likelihood that it is set to remain firmly fixed in policy and practice must not be ignored. Is there a role for special needs education in disrupting education's normative centre? In answering this question I have suggested that

those who work in, on, or at the boundaries of special education, whether they identify themselves as special educators, disability advocates, inclusionists, critical special educators or disability studies scholars, can do more to address its core problems and dilemmas, but doing so will require some shifts in thinking. (Florian 2014, 10)

This represents an important distinction between special and inclusive education but because they are often confounded with each other, neither description is quite right. Where special needs education is characterised as an individualised response to difference that includes targeting differentiated responses to individual difficulty for *some,* inclusive education represents a rights-based approach to education that aims to ensure that: 'those in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons whether as a result of conflict or natural disaster' (UNESCO 2018, 2), are not excluded or marginalised from or within education systems. They are not synonymous concepts but in their current forms they are both imperfect practices with scope for future development that support the equity agenda of SGD 4.

Such future developments will require a concerted effort to extend what is generally available in mainstream schools to a wider range of learners. Where there is collaboration between classroom teachers and specialists deployed in ways that support the learning of everyone, special needs education can function in ways that contribute to the goals of inclusive education. But where the focus is on targeted intervention to address individual need, there is a risk for the repetition of exclusion (Florian, Black-Hawkins, and Rouse 2017).

Conclusion

By recognising that children with disabilities should be educated within an improved inclusive education system, the Salamanca Statement linked the education of students with disabilities to a broader rights-based international education agenda that opened up new possibilities for practice. Consequently, the idea of inclusive education has challenged traditional systems of special education, but the development of inclusive practice has been uneven. This paper explored how the conceptualisation of inclusive has been extended since Salamanca from a focus on learners with disabilities to anyone who may be excluded or marginalised from education.

The acknowledgment that there will be many differences between different learner groups because each and every individual is unique must replace dissatisfaction with special needs education as a response to difference. This then is the starting point for developing inclusive education in a post-Salamanca era. The idea of each learner as unique dissolves the bell-curve barrier between 'most' and 'some', enabling the problem of difference to be replaced by thinking about human diversity as a fundamental element of one's unique individuality and shared humanity. This is important because when difference is construed as an ordinary aspect of human development, then inclusive education can be considered as that which ensures that *everyone* has access to a good quality education. This must take place in systems that do not marginalise some learners because of organisational and curricular structures that sift and sort learners on the basis of pre-determined judgements about who they are and what they can and should learn. As Allan (2011) has argued, this reorientation is an ethical necessity if the iniquities of current practice are to be overcome. The idea of inclusive education for everyone reflects a deliberate effort not only to ensure that it refers to anyone who might be excluded from or have limited access to the general educational system within a country, but one that is extended to everyone. It embraces diversity as an imperative of practice rather than a secondary consideration to be dealt with separately.

Whether inclusive education has, can or should replace special needs education remains an open question. As I have argued elsewhere (Florian 2014, 9):

> without a policy framework to guide provision of specialist support and resource allocation, many people with disabilities would be denied an opportunity for meaningful participation in the activities that typify everyday life, because impairment, by definition, is something that limits functioning, unless it is mediated in some way.

The practical reality is that today, most national and supranational education policies promote the idea of educational inclusion while retaining a traditional special needs orientation to inclusion that relies on individualised approaches such as the identification and assessment of individual need, and specialist provision. The dilemma is that special needs education relies on a policy framework that locates it at the boundary of education's normative centre (Youdell 2006). While it is intended to ensure the right to education for those who would otherwise be excluded from schooling, it also creates problems of inequality within education by offering access to education while simultaneously perpetuating discrimination.

However, it is in the ways that teachers respond to individual differences, the pedagogical choices they make and how they utilise specialist knowledge that matters. Thinking about learning as a shared activity where a single lesson is a different experience for each participant encourages a shift in thinking away from teaching approaches that work for *most* learners existing alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, and towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate and feel they belong. For special needs education, a post-Salamanca inclusion agenda requires a shift in thinking away from the idea of special education as a specialised response to individual difficulty, towards one that focuses on extending what is ordinarily available to everyone in the learning community of the classroom. Supporting class teachers to extend what is generally available to *everybody* rather than including *all* students

by differentiating for *some,* can avoid the negative effects of treating some students as different. While it is not the only shift in thinking required to change special education's relationship with education's normative centre, it is an important addition that opens up new possibilities for the development of inclusive practice that can help to reduce variability in provision. If taken seriously, it can transform the role that special education can play, in aligning its practices more closely to its core values of equal opportunity, respect for human dignity, and a belief in the capacity of all people to learn. These values are consistent with SDG 4.

Furthermore, the reimagining of special needs education is only part of the post-Salamanca task. The argument for a clearer distinction to be made between how special needs educators can work in support of inclusive education and the task of inclusive education which addresses the barriers to participation faced by members of marginalised groups also requires that complacency about what is generally available in schools is also challenged.

Today we live in an uncertain world where the forces of globalisation mean that schools in many parts of the world are increasingly diverse and multicultural in terms of ethnicity, language, religion and range of ability. As people of different national identities and ethnic groups continue to migrate across the world and diversity becomes more commonplace, a move away from the logic of exclusion, towards an acceptance of difference as an ordinary aspect of human development is needed. The post-Salamanca conceptualisation of inclusive education builds on the evidence that inclusive practices can bring benefit to everyone when schools do not see the difficulties in learning experienced by some children as problems for others to solve.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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