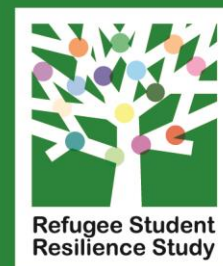


Key Issues Paper No. 6



What is Inclusive Education?¹

The Origins of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education existed, as Steven Taylor (2006) tells us, before it had a name. Essentially it is a response to the longstanding tradition of educational exclusion. Put simply, inclusive education in its inception registers an unequivocal protest against educational exclusion that is symptomatic of and sustenance for social exclusion. Exclusion is characterised by its ubiquity and its antiquity – it is everywhere, and it has been everywhere for a long time (Slee, 2011, 2018). Accordingly, inclusive education is a large and complex project comprising two components. First, is the necessity of building a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the properties, cultures and deleterious impacts of exclusion. Second, armed with the intelligence of that research, is the building of strategies to intervene and dismantle exclusion as a social phenomenon in general and educational tradition in particular.

Inclusive education is a political aspiration and an educational strategy

Access to education is a basic human right for *all children and young people* (OECD, 2017). This is reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly resolution 217A, Article 26, 1948) and strengthened through treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child – CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 44/25, Articles 28 & 29, 1989). Other treaties have been struck to protect this basic human right for vulnerable population groups, including:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW (General Assembly Resolution 34/180, Article 10, 1979).
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – CERD (General Assembly Resolution 2106 (xx), Article 5e(v), 1965)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – CESCR (General Assembly Resolution 2200A (xxi), Article 13, 1966).
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of the Families – CMW (General Assembly Resolution 45/158, Article 30, 1990)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – CRPD (General Assembly Resolution 61/106, Article 24, 2006).

Perhaps a good starting point for tracking the evolution is with the work of UNESCO in the development of the *Education for All* movement commencing with the World Education Conference in Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 on Education for All and Framework for Meeting Basic Education Needs.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001275/127583e.pdf>.

¹ To cite this paper: Slee, R., Johnson, B., Sullivan, A., & Baak, M. (2019). What is inclusive education?, *Refugee Student Resilience Study Key Issues Paper No. 6*. University of South Australia. doi: 10.25954/5d4a5c7d3a5cb

Successive Education for All conferences ensued with both general and specific sets of foci on student population cohorts who are denied their basic right to education. The girl child, working children, children and young people living in or displaced by conflict, the refugee, asylum seeking or traveller child, children and young people with disabilities, people living in poverty, or in remote geographic locations are all subject to exclusion. The list of course is not complete. **Exclusion is contingent and experienced differently in different contexts.** Gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, poverty, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, race and disability intersect variously to produce and or sustain educational exclusion.

“UNESCO’s most recent figures indicate that some 263 million children and youth aged between 6 and 17 years, most of them girls, are not in school today (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). Projections indicate that 25 million of these children will never set foot in a classroom. Significant gender disparities exist, with girls representing two thirds of the total number of children out of school.”

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

Some challenges for inclusive education

The first Karl Mannheim Chair of Sociology of Education at the Institute of Education – University of London, Professor Basil Bernstein clearly presented a blueprint of the requirements for a democratic education (Bernstein, 2000). Prominent in his discussion is the requirement for inclusion. Most importantly, he stipulates that inclusion is not absorption or assimilation. This has been an enduring challenge for inclusive education – resisting the drive towards normalisation. Difference is often cast as defectiveness and the imperative becomes compensatory education, not inclusive, representative or democratic education.

In the *Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Department for Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012) a number of challenges to the implementation of inclusive education were identified. Included was: “The contemporary context of education”; the culture of competitive individualism, and; the focus upon narrow measures of educational achievement which served to further marginalise vulnerable population groups.

Inclusive education is also impeded by deficit views of diverse student identities. How do we ensure that diversity is a resource for learning and that all children matter equally?

Thinking about inclusive education and building educational resilience

Inclusive education demands access, presence, participation and success for all students. What resources do we have to build resilient education communities wherein students from refugee backgrounds can flourish? Universal Design for Learning, collaborative learning, community engagement.

In the disability rights movement there is a mantra – “Nothing about us, without us”. Voices and leadership of people with disabilities is central to building disability studies in education and inclusive education. In this project we are interested in the exclusion/inclusion of student voices, and of the voices of communities. “Nothing about us, without us” resonates with all marginalised population cohorts.

Refugee Student Resilience Study Overview

The *Refugee Student Resilience Study* aims to investigate how schools transcend the past life experiences of students from refugee backgrounds by creating the social and educational conditions that enhance resilience. It is focusing on the policies, practices, relationships, and events that shape the schooling experiences of students and promote their resilience. The research will collect data from a selection of case study secondary schools in two Australian states, including regional and metropolitan locations. These schools will contribute to the research with contextual data relating to good practices that enhance resilience for students from refugee backgrounds.

Education is recognised as a key protective factor in facilitating successful settlement and positive lifelong outcomes for young people from refugee backgrounds. Young people from refugee backgrounds have often had disrupted experiences of education prior to displacement and while language acquisition remains important in refugee education in Australia, we argue that schools may have a more holistic role to play in supporting

students from refugee backgrounds. Schools are sites in which students from refugee backgrounds may access opportunities for academic, social, emotional and cultural learning and development.

For further information please see www.refugeesatschool.edu.au

Acknowledgements

The Refugee Student Resilience Study is being conducted by researchers at the University of South Australia (UniSA). This research is funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme (LP170100145). The following Partner Organisations have contributed funds and/or in-kind support to this Project:

- Brisbane Catholic Education in Queensland (BCE)
- Department of Education and Training (DET)
- Department for Education and Child Development (DECD)
- Catholic Education South Australia (CESA)
- Australian Refugee Association (ARA)

References

- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control, and identity: Theory, research, critique*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Department for Education Employment and Workplace Relations. (2012). *Review of disability standards for education 2005*. Canberra: Australian Government Printer.
- OECD. (2017). *Education at a glance: OECD indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Taylor, S. J. (2006). Before it had a name: Exploring the historical roots of disability studies in education. In S. Danforth & S. Gabel (Eds.), *Vital questions facing disability studies in education* (pp. 289-306). New York: Peter Lang
- UN. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. United Nations.
- UNESCO. (2000). *Education for all: Meeting our collective commitments. The Dakar framework for action*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2010). *Reaching the marginalized: EFA global monitoring report 2010*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2014). *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. EFA global monitoring report 2014*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education 2030 Incheon declaration and framework for action: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*. Incheon, Republic of Korea: World Education Forum.