

SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH EDUCATION:

A Literature Review

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Introduction

Inclusive education is a highly visible yet contentious notion in contemporary education reforms because of conceptual, historical, pragmatic and methodological reasons (e.g. Artiles 2006 p.65). After being put on the policy agenda by an UNESCO report in 1994, “The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education”, researchers grasped the term in order to study it and, consequently, the number of publications on this very interdisciplinary topic is impressive and fast growing (Moen 2008). Inclusive education (IE) arose as a complex subject that includes an array of issues crossing health, education, social welfare, and employment sectors, and, as a result, policy development faces challenges to avoid fragmented and difficult to access services (Peters 2004). At the same time, despite this remarkable interest in IE, very often, when the topic is referred to and discussed, it is as ideology and policy, and much less as evidence based analyses (Emanuelsson, Haug, and Persson 2005). On the policy realm, whereas ‘social inclusion’ and ‘raising standards’ phrases dominate many governments’ agenda for educational reform, many in the field argue that the two concepts, as currently defined, operate largely in opposition to one another. In particular, it is suggested that policies for raising standards, such as the emphasis on competition and choice, are tending to discourage the use of teaching approaches that are responsive to student diversity (West et al 2001).

The following three sections of this paper aims to structure the central issues and to identify both the convergent and divergent arguments and results produced by the new field of IE studies.

I. MAIN CONCEPTS

A large body of the literature on social inclusion in schools refers specifically to the inclusion of pupils with “special educational needs” (SEN) (Mitchell, 2005 and O’Hanlon, 2003). This category – defined slightly differently from one country to another – includes children with mild to severe physical or psychological disabilities. Such disabilities often translate into less than average learning abilities (speed, rhythm, learning style). Other times, a distinction is made between children with disabilities and those with emotional and/or cognitive issues, regarded as displaying SEN. (Gerschel, 2005)

A central tenet of recent discussions is that children are different and have different needs. An inclusive educational style is one that is highly responsive to diversity and to pupils’ different needs, following a principle that sees schools as adapting to pupils’ features, and not the other way around. (Madan Mohan Jha, 2007) Whereas the idea of “inclusive education” - a close relative to the “education for all” standard - admits that children differ along many dimensions (including such features as ethnic background, socio-economic status of their families), the usage of “inclusion”/“social inclusion” seems to be in most cases related to learning difficulties/barriers issues. The connection of such learning difficulties with further characteristics (gender, race etc) seems insufficiently theorized and researched.

The idea of inclusion – within the educational framework – is frequently attached to concepts such as *mainstream* (mainstreaming), *diversity* (exposure to diversity; managing contexts characterized by diversity), *learning environments*, *school culture*, *inclusive schools* (and inclusive classrooms), *equal opportunities*.

One example of a book revolving around the concept of inclusion and its derivatives is an edited volume by Topping and Maloney's, "The Routledge Falmer Reader in Inclusive Education", published in 2005. Their book includes several articles focusing on various dimensions around which disadvantaged or "special needs" group may emerge. The book follows a comprehensive understanding of inclusion as implying the *celebration of diversity* and "supporting the achievement and participation of all pupils who face learning and/or behavior challenges of any kind, in terms of socio-economic circumstances, ethnic origins, cultural heritage, religion, linguistic heritage, gender, sexual preference and so on..." (p. 5)

As inclusion is discussed within its school-circumscribed parameters, references are made to a school's "inclusive culture", which translates into the presence of "some degree of consensus amongst adults around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities." (p. 8). The book attempts to provide an operational definition of an 'inclusive school', by presenting these schools as relying on "participatory methods" and on the cultivation of consistent and systematic relations with pupils' families.

The book's discussion on the connection between SEN, gender and ethnicity [in Chapter 7: *Connecting the disconnected...*, by L. Gerschel] emphasizes, among other things, a possibly important aspect of teachers' and community's perceptions of ethnically different children: the "willingness to attribute pupils' difficulties and disabilities to <within-culture> factors" (p.102), rather than to, for example, poor health care service for ethnic communities. The phenomenon under discussion is in this case the "institutionalized racism." Gerschel questions the current usefulness/relevance of the concept of "SEN" ("reflecting a <within-child> or medical model to guide planning", p. 103) in the light of the multitude of factors that may impact on a child's style of learning; an inclusive approach should then follow this diversity of dimensions, once accepted that peculiar needs may emerge out of a child's gender, belonging to an ethnic and/or religious community, and to a certain socio-economic class. The efforts towards ensuring **an inclusive educational practice** should start from assessing what are the *common needs* (of all participants/children in a school or classroom), what are the *distinct needs* (of discrete groups, defined around one of the dimensions above listed: ethnicity etc), and finally what are the additional individual needs specific to a given pupil (*specific/individual needs*). The example of UK is provided as an illustration of attempts to create guidelines and benchmarks that would assist educational inspectors and teachers in evaluating their own school environments.

Inclusion vs. Integration

In "The Making of the Inclusive School", Thomas et al (1998) refers to a visible change in the discourses about "different" children, with more emphasis placed on "inclusion" as opposed to the previously insisted upon "integration." The difference between the

two approaches is connected to an earlier discussed matter: the conceptual tightness of the “special educational needs.” Thus, whereas *integration* “was usually used to describe the process of the assimilation of children with learning difficulties [...] the key aspect of inclusion, however, is that children who are at a disadvantage for **any** reason are not excluded from the mainstream education.” (p. 14)

Below the distinction between the two concepts/approaches is summarized (Thomas et al, 1998, p.13-14):

Traditional approach (which may include integration)	Inclusionary approach
Focus on student	Focus on classroom
Assessment of student from specialist	Examine teaching/learning factors
Diagnostic outcomes	Collaborative problem-solving
Student programme	Strategies for teachers
Placement in appropriate programme	Adaptive and supportive classroom environment
Focus on needs of 'special' students	Focus on rights of all students
Changing the subject	Changing the school
Benefits to the 'special students'	Benefits to all students
Specialist expertise	Informal support
Special teaching, therapy	Good teaching for all

More recently, in a historical research of the usage of 'integration' and 'inclusion', Thomazet (2009) found that in the French-speaking countries, the word 'inclusion' is sometimes used instead of the usual term "intégration" to refer to the schooling of pupils with special needs in ordinary schools. He argued that "in using the expression 'inclusive education', one can describe not more developed integration but differentiating practices. These differentiating practices allow children and adolescents, whatever their difficulties or disabilities, to find in an ordinary school an educational response, appropriate in its aims and means, in ways that do not differentiate between them and the other pupils of the school." With this approach, it is not the child who is included but the school and the teaching which are inclusive. The special needs are therefore no longer those of the child, but those of the school, and thus go beyond the limits of integration.

There are many authors who consider the terms "social inclusion", "social cohesion" and "social integration", as closely linked. In "The Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion" of the Council of Europe, approved in March 2004, social cohesion is defined as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization”, whereas the Inter-American Development Bank defines social cohesion as “the set of factors that foster a basic equilibrium among individuals in a society, as reflected in their degree of integration in economic, social, political and cultural terms”. Berger-Schmitt and Noll (2000) are among those who discuss the distinctions between inclusion, cohesion and integration,

aiming to provide a clear account of the relationship between them. Thus, social cohesion is a desirable objective, but it may or may not emerge from the elimination of poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, Berger-Schmitt and Noll show that measures to foster social inclusion may or may not increase the capacity of people to live together in harmony. Therefore, social inclusion, does not equal social integration (Atkinson and Marlier 2010, p.5).

Inclusion versus Education for all

In a recent article, Miles and Singal explores the conceptual affinities (redefined over time) between “inclusive education” and “education for all” (2010). Education for all (EFA) represents an international commitment to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education of good quality. EFA places an emphasis on the fact that “schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups”(Miles and Singal 2010 p. 7, quoting UNESCO)

According to the two authors, the opportunities presented by the Education for All (EFA) movement since 1990 have been unprecedented: it contributed to the emergence of education as a rights issue, the realization that education is central to developing economies, the growing disability movement, and a deeper realization that education is essential for global tolerance. However, they argue that the ‘value added’ nature of inclusive education is not only in its raising of issues of quality of education and placement, but more importantly it brings to the forefront issues about social justice (p. 12): inclusive education provides an opportunity for society to examine critically its social institutions and structures, and it challenges didactic, teacher-centered teaching practices, such as rote learning, and so opens up opportunities for developing better pedagogy and greater competence. Inclusive education offers an opportunity for EFA to begin to make distinctions between ‘moral’ and ‘mechanical’ reforms.

Varieties of inclusion

Inclusion has many meanings and its ambiguous usage and lack of clarity can have negative effects on the shaping of policies. Mitchell's edited volume, "Contextualizing Inclusive Education. Evaluating Old and New Perspectives", published in 2005, aims to provide comprehensive typologies of inclusion and to bring further clarification of the term. The book presents several case studies from diverse regions of the world, centered on the local understandings of SEN. One main source of variance in the meaning of inclusion is due to its multiple facets: “inclusive education extends beyond special needs arising from disabilities and includes considerations of other sources of disadvantage and marginalization such as gender, poverty, language, ethnicity and geographic isolation.” (p.1). Chapter 9, by Fletcher and Artiles, provides the following typology of varieties of inclusion (page 212), based on Dyson (2001):

Variety of inclusion	Target group	What it means to 'be included'	Vision of inclusive society	Implications for schools
Inclusion as placement	Children with SEN	To have the right to be in regular schools and classrooms	Rights-based	Schools must acknowledge rights and provide support
Inclusion as education for all	Groups with poor quality education	To have access to school education	Non-discriminatory	School must be capable of educating all learners
Inclusion as participation	All learners, especially those who are marginalized	To face minimal barriers to participation	Rights-based, pluralistic and cohesive	Schools must critically examine current practices to identify and remove barriers

Dyson and Roberts, in “A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of school-level actions for promoting participation by all students”, published in 2002, share a similar broad understanding of what inclusive education means. Whereas some commentators see inclusion as effectively being about a reform of special education in order to place and maintain students with disabilities in mainstream schools (see, for instance, Lipsky & Gartner, 1997), and others tend to align educational inclusion with social inclusion and see it in terms of raising the attainments of low-achieving groups (see, for instance, Ofsted, 2000), Dyson and Roberts draw on a wider notion of inclusive education and build an index based on the following key ideas:

1. Inclusion in education involves the processes of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.
2. Inclusion involves restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality.
3. Inclusion is concerned with the learning and participation of all students vulnerable to exclusionary pressures, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as ‘having special educational needs’.

This view on inclusive education has, amongst other things, informed important policy documents – notably, UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education’s *Index for Inclusion* (Booth *et al.*, 2000).

Dimensions of inclusion

Several authors assert that inclusion can be understood with reference to both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension represents different levels in the

education system, ranging from ideology, policy and structures, via teaching- and learning-processes to results (Haug 2010 p.2). The Index for Inclusion, developed by Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, identifies three vertical dimensions of school life: policy, culture and practice (Booth et al. 2000). According to Lundgren, there are three different horizontal systems that constrain, govern and regulate the teaching process: curriculum (goal system), administrative apparatus (frame system) and judicial apparatus (rule system) (Lundgren 1981).

Haug have identified four key criteria of inclusion for inclusive education that has to be assessed both vertically and horizontally (2003, 2010):

1. Fellowship: All children should be a member of a school class and be a natural part of the social, cultural and professional life at school together with everybody else.

2. Participation: Pupils should be allowed to contribute to the good of the fellowship according to their qualifications and to be given opportunities to benefit from the same fellowship.

3. Democratization: All pupils shall have the opportunity to comment upon and to influence matters concerning their own education (democratization).

4. Benefit: All pupils should be given an education to their advantage both socially and substantially.

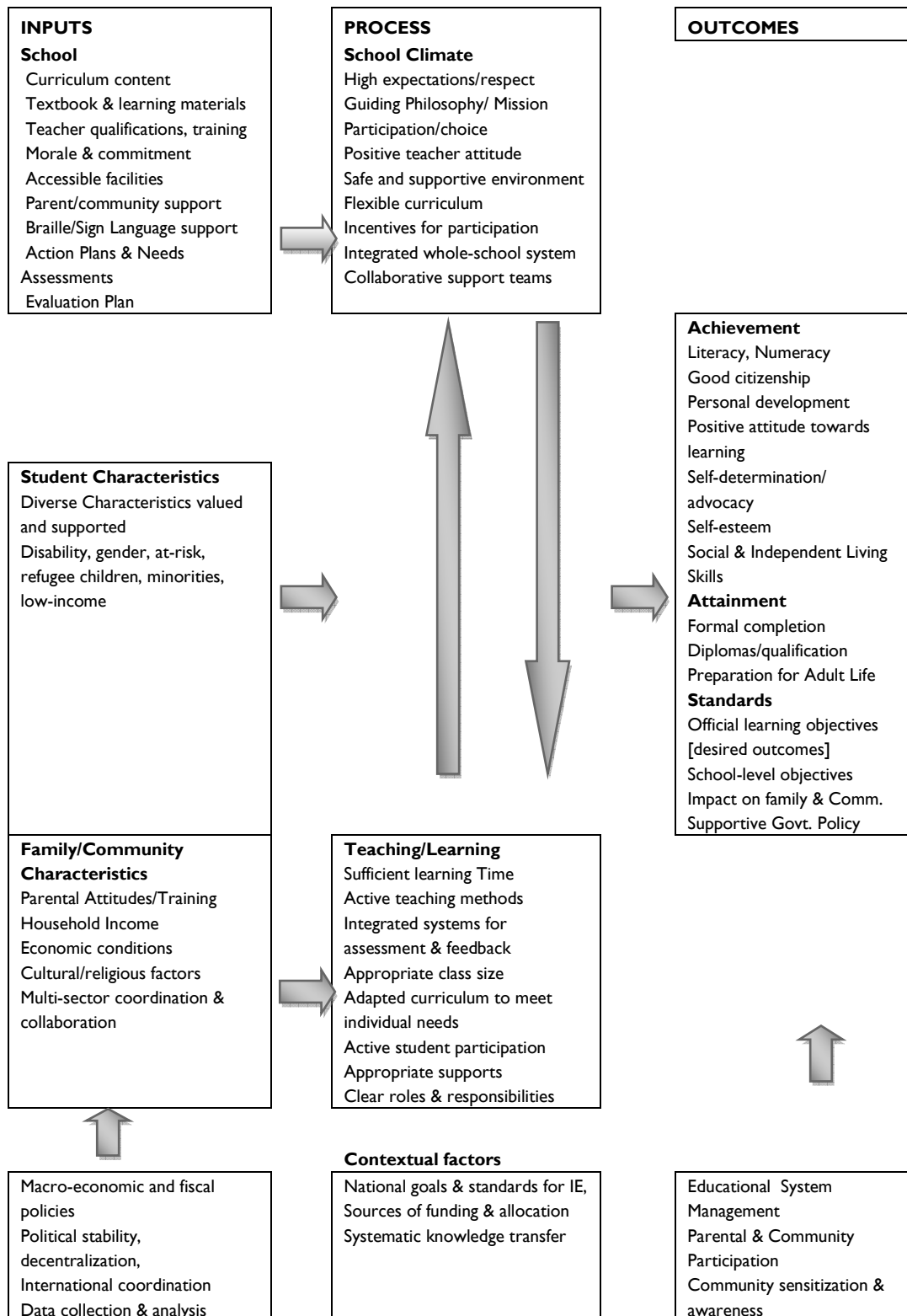
An even more complex conceptual guide is proposed by Peters, in the "Inclusive Education: an EFA Strategy for All Children" 2004 report, aimed to be used as a map for educational planning and evaluation in concert with instruments such as measures of inclusion. It consists of four domains of inputs, processes, outcomes, and contextual factors in an open-system that considers external factors (e.g., policy, legislation, cultural and socio-economic conditions) as integral components of IE development as a whole.

2. METHODOLOGY

In a well known definition, Mancur Olson called a social indicator "a statistic of direct normative interest which facilitates concise, comprehensive and balanced judgments about the condition of major aspects of a society. It is in all cases a direct measure of welfare and is subject to the interpretation that if it changes in the 'right' direction, while other things remain equal, things have gotten better, or people are 'better off'" (Olson, 1969: 97).

As a field of social science social indicators research was born in the United States in the mid-1960s, as part of an attempt of the American space agency NASA to evaluate the impact of the American space program on U.S. society. The project came to the conclusion that there was almost a complete lack of adequate data but also of concepts and appropriate methodologies for this purpose (Noll 2002).

The OECD started its program of work on social indicators in 1970, and at the same time, the Social and Economic Council of the United Nations initiated a project in order to develop the System of Social and Demographic Statistics, in which social indicators were supposed to play a key role (Noll 2002).



Among social indicators, social inclusion received great attention within policy making processes at national and supranational levels. In a recent study, Atkinson and Marlier aimed to demonstrate the analytical and operational significance of the measurement of social inclusion, to identify the key issues that have to be debated in this context and to produce a list of recommendations (Atkinson and Marlier 2010). Some of their main conclusions are summarized below:

1. Given the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon at issue, measurement of social inclusion is a task of considerable difficulty. Apart from economic resources and employment, fields to be covered include, *inter alia*, health, education, affordable access to other public services (for example, justice), housing, civil rights, security and justice, well-being, information and communications, mobility, social and political participation, leisure and culture;

2. In order for the measurement of social inclusion to meet the subnational, national and international objectives, close links are required between the design of social indicators and the questions that they are intended to answer. Eight principles have been put forward:

- An indicator should identify the essence of the problem and have an agreed normative interpretation
- An indicator should be robust and statistically validated
- An indicator should be interpretable in an international context
- An indicator should reflect the direction of change and be susceptible to revision as improved methods become available
- The measurement of an indicator should not impose too large a burden on countries, on enterprises or on citizens
- The portfolio of indicators should be balanced across the different dimensions
- The indicators should be mutually consistent and the weight of single indicators in the portfolio should be proportionate
- The portfolio of indicators should be as transparent and accessible as possible to citizens

3. While quantification is essential for analyzing social inclusion, quantitative indicators are still not sufficient. These need to be accompanied by qualitative evidence, which helps interpret the numbers and provides a start in understanding the underlying mechanisms.

4. Some of the broader indicators of social inclusion, such as political voice of the poor and the socially excluded, may contain elements that are inherently subjective but that may prove highly useful for the analysis of certain aspects of social inclusion.

5. A global perspective does not imply that there should be a single global set of indicators for all countries and all purposes. Indeed, there is a wide diversity of national and also subnational circumstances across the world. When debating social inclusion indicators, it is important to address various definitional issues, which encompass: the measurement of poverty in absolute rather than in relative terms, the use of consumption rather than income as the basis for calculating the “financial” indicators, and the distinction between stock and flow indicators and between static and dynamic indicators;

6. A natural starting point for constructing social indicators is the position of individual citizens. For some purposes, however, we may wish to look at the position of a unit wider than the individual. Once we aggregate, a range of possibilities open up for the unit of analysis, making use of various potential criteria: household, spending unit, family unit, inner family and even wider groupings.

7. The construction of performance indicators needs to be based on a participatory approach, involving the regional and local public authorities, the different non-governmental actors and bodies implicated in the fight against social exclusion, including social partners, non-governmental and grassroots organizations (at international, national and subnational levels), and the poor and socially excluded people themselves. Widespread citizens' ownership is key to promoting social inclusion.

In a 1998 article, "Continuities and developments in research into the education of pupils with learning difficulties", Skidmore reviews some of the research done on issues that relate to pupils with educational needs. In doing so, three major research approaches are highlighted (see below, p. 4):

Tradition	Level of focus	Explanatory model	Form of intervention proposed	Epistemology
Psychomedical	Individual	Learning difficulties arise from the deficits within the individual pupil	Diagnostic testing and quasi-clinical remediation	Positivist
Organisational	Institutional	Learning difficulties arise from deficiencies in the ways in which schools are organized	Programme of school restructuring to eliminate organisational deficiencies	Functionalist
Sociological	Societal	Learning difficulties arise from the reproduction of structural inequalities in society through processes of sorting and tracking	Root and branch political reform of the education system to remove inequitable practices	Structuralist

Despite policy relevance, little systematic empirical research has been done on inclusive education. Very often, when inclusion in education is discussed, it is as ideology and not as experience. (Haug 2010, Emanuelsson, Haug, and Persson 2005) In one of the few systematic reviews of the effectiveness of inclusive education measures, Dyson, Howes and Roberts, which seek to identify studies that are both conceptually

rigorous and methodologically sound, found that a number of case studies have been coined as providing information about the schools that promote participation of all, but, at the same time, that there is a "lack of detail about methodology in much of the literature." (2002 p.5). Their general view of the methodological approaches of the studies on inclusion through school can be summarized as follows (2002 p. 49-50):

1. Studies tend to be located in schools which have been identified (by the researcher, by some key informant or by the schools themselves) as inclusive. Typically, such schools have an explicit policy of inclusion.

2. Most studies are single or small-*n* case studies. Where more than one school is studied, it is usually because all have been identified as 'inclusive'.

3. Interviews with stakeholders tend to be a major source of data. Some studies include data from student interviews or parents (Hunt *et al.* 2000). Others include observation data. However, the tendency is for teachers' voices to predominate in the data that are presented.

4. Data on outcomes for students (in terms of their attainments or of their participation in cultures, curricula and communities) are sometimes absent or reported by adults, or inferred from an account of teacher practices. Direct reports of outcomes data are rare.

5. Some studies understand school culture as complex and contradictory (Dyson & Millward 2000, Deering 1996). These studies search for contradictions between different discourses in the school and between the espousal of inclusion on the one hand and non-inclusive practices on the other. In the majority of cases, however, the underlying assumption seems to be that culture is monolithic and that there is no need to seek out 'dissident' voices or contradictory practices.

6. Studies tend to be cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Attempts to characterize schools in a non-inclusive state and contrast this with an earlier or later inclusive state are therefore rare.

In a review of the Norwegian research literature, Haug found that two different approaches to inclusion are particularly prominent. The first is inclusion in a macro-perspective, analyzing the structural characteristics of the whole school system. The second approach is inclusion in a micro-perspective, with detailed studies of teaching and learning processes in single classrooms, where researchers go into classrooms to look at the organization of the teaching and learning processes, pupils' activities, how the pupils experience the teaching etc. (Haug 2010). In the first case the orientation is mostly around judicial and administrative regulation of school, and mostly related to special education. In the second case curriculum aspects dominate. In the first case the criteria for inclusion are quantitative, clear and simple, objective and formal. In the second case they are qualitative, hidden, subjective and a matter of individual appraisal and analysis.

According to Haug, the macro-perspective approach identifies some structural and formal aspects of education as of most importance for inclusion. They allow comparisons at national and sub-national level, and across time. However, the validity of the variables used as indicators of inclusion is often questionable. His argument is that more or less inclusive and exclusive structures cannot alone reveal the degree of inclusion in practice. The formal organization of school indicates what opportunities for

inclusion exist, but inclusion is also affected by what are the processes and what results are achieved within structures. Haug gives three main categories of challenges posed by the macro-perspective approach:

1. First, the same school can take several non-inclusive directions both when it comes to special education, and for all pupils. Teaching can be organized in several segregated ways within school such as tracking, special classes and part-time special education given outside classes in small groups.

2. Second, processes within structures do not necessarily reflect inclusive intentions. To be in a class does not in itself guarantee that the teaching and learning taking place there correspond with inclusive ideas.

3. Third, the results achieved within what seems to be inclusive structures do not always reflect inclusive intentions. Some groups of pupils may benefit more from certain ways of working in schools than others. For instance, pupils with parents with low cultural capital systematically achieve less than pupils with parents with a high level of education.

In contrast to the macro-perspective, the focus in the micro-oriented research is the teacher and the pupils. An important idea behind this research is to give examples of good inclusive teaching as an inspiration to others, and in this way also contribute to defining inclusion. According to Haug, the challenge for the micro-perspective approach is that inclusion cannot be observed directly in classroom activity. It is not possible to register discrete and separate incidents and from them conclude directly about the conditions. Instead it must be summarized from thick observational descriptions and thorough analysis that can be broken down into smaller units (Haug 2010 p. 5). Therefore it is crucial how inclusion is understood in these studies.

3. DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Outcomes of IE are illusive and difficult to measure. The challenge is to measure success in terms of broad indicators of outcomes and impact. Thus, most of the studies rely on student achievement tests of content knowledge, although they are not strongly linked to success in adult life. At the same time IE programs' assessments require improvements at all levels: the individual (SEN students, other students, teachers), family, community, organization, and government, and against the goals of inclusion within a democratic, human-rights-based environment (Stubbs 1994, Lynch 2001, Peters 2004).

For most IE programs, research and evaluation of outcomes are largely based on case studies, and qualitative data. I briefly present three of the recent studies that rely on qualitative or mixed-methods approaches.

First, a study by Moen, "Inclusive education practice: results of an empirical study", published in 2008, provides an example for the category of the IE studies that are based on a small number of cases but extensive observations (over a five months period) and in-depth interviews. This focused research singles out the experience of a Norwegian teacher, Ann, with the class she teaches in, as well as of two pupils with special needs from the class under study. The research outlines the dilemmas faced by

a teacher "who masters the daunting task of inclusive education" (p.73) and the results are not aimed to be generalized to the population of all primary teachers in Norway. Instead, Moen suggests that the narrative of Ann and her inclusive practice in her current classroom are to be considered as a thinking tool or a cultural scaffold because it may initiate further reflections on the topic of inclusive practice, an "open work" where the meaning is dependent upon those who read or hear about it.

Second, Ben-Yehuda, Leiser and Last' article, "Teacher educational beliefs and sociometric status of special educational needs students in inclusive classrooms", published in 2010, is an example of a large qualitative study, based on 24 teachers and 782 students, where interviews are supplemented by sociometric measures. Their study aims to reveal the characteristics of teachers who have successfully promoted "school mainstreaming." The analysis showed significant differences between the two groups (teachers who successfully implemented school mainstreaming and those who failed to do so). Here are some of the main findings: "Significant differences were found on the four themes: personal relationships; support and encouragement; knowledge of students background; and contact with parents. These areas represent the teachers' personal involvement in the education of students mainstreamed. Successful inclusion teachers, are interested in the child's' home background, and facilitate meaningful and positive communication with parents." (p. 30) Moreover, "Successful teachers expressed a strong belief in the inclusion of most students with disabilities excluding only those with severe behaviour problems or cognitive disabilities, which present significant behavioural and instructional difficulties." (p. 30) and "Successful teachers attributed the social and academic progress of included students to their own skills, abilities and activities. On the other hand unsuccessful teachers believed that students' progress depends on external factors to their teaching and support, i.e. on student effort or motivation. This finding is supported by previous research which has shown that teachers with a higher sense of personal teaching efficacy have a better understanding of inclusion and tend to use more adaptive instructional techniques for students with special educational needs" (p.31)

Finally, a study by Petriwskyj, "Diversity and inclusion in the early years", published in 2010, is a mixed-method research based on both qualitative and quantitative analyses on 22 early-years teachers and 431 children in kindergarten. The research looks at the factors influencing teachers' response to diversity. An important step in this sense is the inquiry of teachers' understanding of diversity and inclusion. The study reports that in the early classes, most of the interviewed teachers understood diversity as disability and less as a matter of cultural diversity; the three axes around which the idea of within classroom diversity were: disability, learning difficulties and linguistic differences.

Whereas most of the IE studies rely on small scale qualitative data there are several quantitative or large-scale studies that have been undertaken. An early meta-analysis of 50 studies (Weiner, 1985) compared the academic performance of mainstreamed and segregated students with mild handicapping conditions. The mean academic performance of the integrated groups was in the 80th percentile, while segregated students scored in the 50th percentile. Another early quantitative research in on the effects of IE, conducted in the United States by the Working Forum on

Inclusive Schools in 1994, identified the following best practice characteristics for Inclusive Education:

1. A sense of community: the views that all children belong and can learn
2. Leadership: school administrators play a critical role in implementation
3. High standards: high expectations for all children appropriate to their needs
4. Collaboration and cooperation: support and co-operative learning
5. Changing roles and responsibilities of all staff
6. Array of interconnected services, such as health, mental health and social services
7. Partnership with parents, seen by school as equal partners in educating children
8. Flexible learning environments, focusing on pacing, timing, and location
9. Strategies based on research that identify best practices for teaching and learning
10. New forms of accountability, using standardized tests and multiple sources
11. Access: physical environment and technology
12. Continuing professional development: on-going

Also published in 1994, Baker, Wang and Walberg conducted a meta-analysis of IE studies that used a common measure of the IE outcome. Their study found a small to moderate beneficial effect of IE on academic and social outcomes of SEN students. Another research conducted in the United States, the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2), found that secondary students with disabilities who take more general education classes have lower grade point averages than their peers in pull-out academic settings, but they score closer to grade level on standards-based assessments of learning than their peers in math and science, even when disability classification is considered (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2003).

Koretz and Hamilton (2000) reported that SEN students who received test accommodations scored well above the average for non-disabled students in every subject except math. Another large-scale longitudinal study of Chicago schools measured the performance of students with disabilities on standardized achievement tests after being placed in special education classrooms. Students did not do better, and tended to grow further and further apart, in terms of achievement from comparable students not placed in special education.

Another major study was carried out by OECD (1999), "Inclusive Education at Work: Students with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools", between 1995 and 1998 in eight countries from three regions (North America, Europe, and the Pacific). Its general conclusion was that "from organizational, curriculum and pedagogical perspectives, given certain safeguards, there is no reason to maintain generally segregated provision for disabled students in public education systems." On the contrary, changes in pedagogy and curriculum development were found to benefit all students.

A more recent study, "Special Needs Education in Europe", conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs in 30 countries and published in 2003, reinforced findings of earlier OECD studies in some areas. The study found that transforming special schools into resource centers is a common trend. These centers typically provide training and courses for teachers and other professionals, develop and

disseminate materials and methods, support mainstream schools and parents, provide short-term or part-time help for individual students and support students in entering the labor market. In addition, the research showed that Individualized Education Plans play a major role in determining the degree and type of adaptations needed in evaluating students' progress.

Peters argues that financing and support of educational services for students with special needs is a primary concern for all countries, regardless of available resources, yet, a growing body of research assert that IE is not only cost-efficient, but also cost-effective, and that "equity is the way to excellence" (Peters 2004 p. 23). She gives the example of an OECD report (1994) that estimated average costs of SNE segregated placements as 7 to 9 times higher than SEN student placement in general education classrooms.

Evidence on effects of inclusive education that extends beyond the SEN students is remarkably scarce. The 1999 OECD study is one of the few exceptions, since it succeeded to provide substantial evidence that IE improves performance of non-SEN students. More recently, Dyson, Howes and Roberts, in "A systematic review of the effectiveness of school level action for promoting participation by all students" study published in 2002, intended to conduct a comprehensive and systematic analysis of research on school-level actions for promoting participation by all students. The research discussed by the paper revolves around the following central question: *What evidence is there that mainstream schools can act in ways which enable them to respond to student diversity so as to facilitate participation by all students in the cultures, curricula and communities of those schools?*, while being interested into finding "evidence relating to action which schools might take to make themselves more inclusive"

Although they designed the review to examine research in schools that had taken a holistic approach to inclusion (i.e., a focus on all students, emphasis on multiple forms of participation), they found that most studies presented detailed data only on one or a limited number of distinct student groups and on how schools were responding to these groups, and that the vast majority of studies included a focus on students with special educational needs and disabilities (p.27). From a methodological point of view, most of the studies included in the review presented considerable weaknesses. All 27 were based on case study designs about the structures and processes of inclusion models, most of them were cross-sectional and conducted in primary schools that were self-identified as inclusive or selected by researchers or other informants as pursuing an inclusive agenda. The evidence was based mostly on interviews and unstructured observations. Interviews were often conducted with teachers and other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, parents, and students) and generally focused on participants' descriptions of school inclusive cultures (e.g., features of such cultures and factors that supported an inclusive school culture). Teacher perspectives dominated research reports. Hence, the evidence on school cultures is mostly grounded in teachers' beliefs and views about their schools (p. 5).

Despite this scarcity of methodologically sound research, several conclusions emerged, with implications for prospective policies:

I. A first conclusion relates to the inclusive culture that characterizes certain schools. Such inclusive culture is in turn the result of a relative consensus over a

number of values “of respect for difference” and “a commitment to offering all children access to learning opportunities”. The implication for policy is that, in the attempt to build such an “inclusive culture” within a school it may not be sufficient to operate changes in the pedagogical tools and to implement “reforms alone” (p. 57). At the same time, it shows that is relevant to conduct an assessment of the extent to which “inclusive values and approaches” are present at the level of school leadership (p. 57)

2. A further aspect relates to the agreement between particular schools’ efforts to open up towards inclusion and the agenda set by the national policies and priorities in the field. (p. 57)

3. Lastly, there is the idea of schools should build a solid relationship with the families and the communities, with an emphasis on tolerance and inclusiveness. (p. 57-58)

Another literature review report with a broader view on inclusion forms and taking into account conceptual clarity and methodological rigor, “The impact of population inclusivity in schools on student outcomes”, was published by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson and Kaplan in 2005. Their analysis of 26 studies on the effect of inclusion on nondisabled students suggests that although many studies included pupils with intellectual and learning difficulties, research reports were not always clear on the types of special needs considered in the study. As a result, “it is difficult to provide direct conclusions regarding the impact of including pupils with a specific type of [special needs] on the academic and/or social or other outcomes of all school pupils” (p. 4). They also found that more than 50% of the selected studies were published in the 1990s and the vast majority (85%) were conducted in the United States. Almost half of these studies (12) documented only academic outcomes.

The authors expressed a serious concern about the slightly loose or uncertain way in which the term “inclusion” was defined. As a result of conceptual imprecision, they found that it is not possible to judge from the review whether certain types of inclusion arrangements were associated with particular academic or social outcomes (Kalambouka et al, p. 64).

Whereas previous literature reviews offered mixed results on the effect of inclusion on nondisabled students, this review found that the inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities in regular schools tends to have a positive effect on the academic and social performance of students without special needs and disabilities. When a support system was present, there was a slightly greater positive effect for academic outcomes. The notable exception to the positive link was the category of students with emotional/behavioral disorders, where the outcomes of inclusion were negative. It should be noted that the data on the effect of inclusion was not examined across various curriculum subjects.

Additionally, the review found that successful inclusive education programs are the result of intensive, coordinated, and systematic work that is grounded in a strong and explicit commitment to an inclusive vision of education on the part of parents, students, and professionals (Kalambouka et al, p. 5).

IE is one of the main themes of the larger discussion on social inclusion of Roma population. The widespread practice of ethnic segregation has been well documented

in the case of Roma children in the ex-communist societies (e.g. Grigoras and Surdu, 2004; Surdu 2003). Ethnic segregation refers both to the processes that lead to the creating homogenous Roma classrooms, as well as to the invisible, within-the-classroom segregation, in which Roma pupils are treated de facto differently from non-Roma ones, with teachers that have a higher tolerance towards failure for the Roma pupils and who pay less attention to their educational progress. After conducting a large scale qualitative and quantitative research on Romania, Fleck and Rughinis conclude that school segregation affects dramatically the quality of the educational and social experiences of children. They found that in a society where 25% of Roma pupils learn in classrooms with a majority of Roma children, and an additional 28% learn in classes which have around half Roma children, Roma pupils in segregated classes have a significantly higher risk of illiteracy: around 15% of pupils in classes with a majority of Roma children are illiterate, compared to around 4% of the other Roma pupils (Fleck and Rughinis 2008).

A special category of studies in the IE field is that of action research, an approach understood as "an interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving actions implemented in a collaborative context with data-driven collaborative analysis or research to understand underlying causes enabling future predictions about personal and organizational change" (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

One such example is a study by Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, "Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network" published in 2004, which had the whole school as the unit of analysis, and used a broad definition of inclusive education, that is, "reduce barriers to learning and participation that might impact on a wide range of students" (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004a, p. 2). Although the target population in this research is identified in rather ample terms (e.g., all students and a wide range of students), the main group of interest is students with special needs and disabilities. The authors characterized their project as "critical collaborative action research" in which inclusive education tenets were used inductively to examine local practices and develop action plans to become more inclusive. The team created a network based on an action research approach to work in 25 schools throughout three local education agencies (LEAs) in a four-year period (1999-2004). The questions addressed in this work regarded the way the schools address the tension found in the education reform climate in the United Kingdom between the social justice agenda of the inclusive education movement and the neo-liberal economic competitiveness rhetoric that permeates the standards reforms. Ainscow and his colleagues identified two stances toward this situation that they label pessimistic and optimistic views. The former argues that the standards movement grounded in market driven policies hinder the creation of school cultures supportive of inclusive education. In contrast, the optimistic view contends inclusive practices are "likely to emerge under appropriate organizational conditions" and that schools can engineer processes and structures that buffer the anti-inclusion pressure of the standards reforms (Ainscow et al., 2004, p. 15).

Another example of an action research study, is Christine O'Hanlon's "Educational Inclusion as Action Research: An Interpretive Discourse" book, published in 2003. She argues in this research that "inclusion can be many things", much more

than the idea that “no child or young person should be excluded from mainstream schooling because of perceived learning differences, language, cultural, racial, class, religious or behavioral differences” (O’Hanlon, 2003, p.13). Dealing rather with the presence of one or another disability as the criterion of pupils’ differentiation from the mainstream, the author presents her own experience with teaching in classrooms where such children are included together with other pupils. The successful integration of children initially regarded with mistrust by their colleagues came as a result of a change in the teacher’s own attitude. Ceasing to perceive her “different” students as the carriers of a diagnosed disability which called for special treatment, she started instead to search for their hidden talents and abilities. By cultivating those skills, the extent of their integration in the classroom increased (O’Hanlon, 2003).

In summary, there are many promising findings in the fast growing literature on inclusion, showing increase of the conceptual refinement and strengthening of methodological rigor. At the same time, however, it is difficult to disagree with some of critical comments regarding the development of the domain (Dyson, Howes and Roberts 2002, Artiles 2003, Haug 2010). First, there is incongruence between inclusive education theory and its practice. Although the conceptualization of inclusive education has become increasingly sophisticated, the research focus has been on students with disabilities rather than on effects of diversity in terms of socio-economic circumstances, ethnic origins, cultural heritage, religion, linguistic heritage, gender, sexual preference and so on. Second, although inclusive education has been increasingly theorized, lack of conceptual clarity has detrimental effects by compromising the accumulation of empirical facts and insights. Third, the research methods used have not produced thick descriptions of the complexities associated with the development of inclusive education programs. Additional gaps that result from methodological issues result from the validity problems of operationalizations, lack of detailed documentation of change processes and clear implications for the transferability of research findings, as well as the fact that entire regions are under researched and that longitudinal studies are remarkable few.

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