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Research in the field of inclusive education: time for a rethink?*

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to challenge thinking and practice amongst researchers in the field of inclusive education. It does this based on an analysis of published articles in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* between 2005 and 2015, which identified topics and methodologies used in studies of inclusive education. The analysis highlights the fact that most of the studies are only concerned with certain groups of learners and that a limited number make use of collaborative, transformative approaches. It is argued that focusing only on some students, rather than on all, is contrary to the principles of inclusive education. At the same time, given the emphasis of inclusion on enabling the participation for all students, it is argued that more research needs to adopt collaborative approaches that set out to change thinking and practice in the field. Illustrative examples from articles that used such approaches are discussed to highlight their potential benefits.

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Introduction

Inclusive education has been a contested term since its appearance, with strong advocates as well as strong opponents (Brantlinger 1997). Others have argued that it has become a buzzword, implying that it is simply a fashion (O'Hanlon and Thomas 2004). The term has gained grounds internationally since the United Nations Salamanca Statement (1994), signed by 92 member countries, which argued for schools with an inclusive orientation as being 'the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all'. Since then, the term has undergone considerable scrutiny, with a variety of definitions used by different authors.

Opertti, Walker, and Zhang (2014) suggest that there are four core ideas internationally that relate to the continually evolving journey towards inclusion: the human rights-based perspective (1948–), a response to children with special needs (1990–), a response to marginalised groups (2000–) and transforming education systems (2005–). As they rightly argue, 'regions are still far from effectively implementing the concept of inclusive education as transforming the education system at large' (159), and a number of countries are still focusing on either special needs or other marginalised groups.

As a result of their review of international trends, Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006a) suggest a typology of six ways of thinking about inclusion. This is useful for thinking about the various ways in which inclusion has been conceptualised. These are as follows:

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- *Inclusion as concerned with disability and 'special educational needs'*: this is seen as the most common approach. As the authors highlight, seeing inclusion as concerned with disability and 'special educational needs' can act as a barrier to the development of the broader view of inclusion. At the same time, the way categories are used to draw attention to the deficiencies of individuals, rather than addressing wider contextual factors, might create barriers to individuals' participation.
- *Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions*: here, inclusion is associated with children with challenging behaviour who might be, therefore, excluded from school. However, the authors again draw attention to the contextual factors that might lead to these exclusions.
- *Inclusion as about all groups vulnerable to exclusion*: similar to the first perspective, this way of thinking focuses on certain categories of students, such as travellers and ethnic minorities, who are seen as vulnerable to exclusion.
- *Inclusion as the promotion of the school for all:* this approach relates to what is called the comprehensive school in England, which refers to the development of a school for all, rather than allocating children in different kinds of schools based on their attainment at the age of 11, as it used to happen in the past.
- *Inclusion as 'Education for All'*: this refers to UNESCO's 'Education for All' agenda, with its focus on increasing access to and participation within education internationally, by setting certain goals. As the authors highlight, setting global targets can be challenging, since there are differences at the local level.
- *Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society*: here, the articulation of inclusive values, such as equity, participation, community and respect for diversity, is seen as important in guiding overall policies and practices.

What is important here is that these conceptualisations highlight the fact that inclusive education can be understood in different ways, and that different emphases can be given by different authors and stakeholders. Of all the conceptualisations, I choose to focus on what they define as a principled approach to education, which highlights the need for the articulation of values, and use these values as a starting point to develop practices. Similarly, Allan (2005) refers to inclusion as an ethical project, something that we must do to ourselves, rather than as something that we do to a discrete population of others. Therefore, the issue of values and ethics is central to inclusion.

In an attempt to define inclusion as a principled approach, Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006a) go on to suggest that 'inclusion is concerned with all children and young people in schools; it is focused on presence, participation and achievement' (25). Mittler (2000) has also argued that inclusion is about facilitating active involvement and participation. What is distinctive in Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006a) definition, however, is the fact that the focus is on all children and that the three concepts of presence, participation and achievement are brought together. In other words, this definition emphasises the need to move away from focusing only on whether and where children are educated, to also looking at their participation and their achievement.

For me, the focus on all, rather on certain groups of students, is significant. Labelling individuals has the potential dangers of stigmatisation and damage (Lauchlan and Boyle 2007). In relation to inclusion, as mentioned earlier, such a focus has the potential danger of moving away efforts that look at contextual factors towards a focus on individuals' deficiencies. In addition, as I have demonstrated through my own work, a focus on categories might neglect other children who do not belong in a predetermined category and as such become marginalised (Messiou 2006, 2012). However, it is important to bear in mind the arguments of those who take different views. For example, some writers argue that a focus on some groups of learners, such as disabled students and those defined as having special educational needs, alongside a recognition of difference, is necessary for provision to be made available, in order to address barriers in education (Norwich 1993; Terzi 2005). These two positions – a focus on the impact of contextual factors on all learners, and a concern with the recognition of difference – relate to different ideological positions. More specifically, they reflect

what have been defined as the social and the medical models of disabilities (Barnes, Oliver, and Barton 2002; Oliver 1996).

A focus on all, rather than on some, is echoed on the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* journal website, where it is stated that 'the journal extends beyond enrolment to *successful participation* which generates greater options for *all* people in education and beyond'. Booth and Ainscow (2002) define participation as:

> … learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared learning experiences. It requires active engagement with learning and having a say in how education is experienced. More deeply, it is about being recognised, accepted and valued for oneself. (3)

Therefore, adopting these definitions – and especially the idea of inclusive education as being concerned with *all* children's *presence, participation and achievement* – the position that I am taking here is that research in inclusive education should focus on all children. At the same time, I am adopting Clark et al.'s (1995) 'organisational paradigm' of inquiry which highlights the need to focus on identifying features within schools that facilitate responses to diversity. It is worth adding that a similarly broader definition is now increasingly recognised and reflected in international policy documents, such as the most recent Incheon Declaration, 'Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all', published in May 2015 following the World Forum on Education.

Similar ideas inform the Index for Inclusion (2002) – a widely used review and self-development tool for schools – with its focus on the importance of analysing contextual factors in schools in order to address barriers to learning and participation of all students. Therefore, following such approaches, the position that I am taking is that research in the field of inclusive education should focus on contextual barriers, rather than on deficit views that place the blame for educational failure on individual learners. I also take the view that such research should adopt forms of inquiry that can be done in collaborative ways, in line with inclusive principles. As Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006a) argue, collaborative ways of working, where researchers work alongside participants in schools, are intended to overcome the traditional gap between research and practice. Therefore, it can be argued that employing collaborative approaches of research in inclusive education will, in turn, facilitate presence, participation and achievement. Taking such a position, I was interested in finding out whether this is indeed happening, or not, in research in the field of inclusive education.

The process of analysis: topics of focus and methodologies

With this purpose in mind, I carried out an analysis of research that has been carried out in the field of inclusive education over the last 11 years and published in this journal. The *International Journal of Inclusive Education* is the only peer-reviewed journal which includes the term 'inclusive education' in its title. At the same time, it is regarded as a prestigious journal in the field of inclusive/special education and learning support. Though it is acknowledged that there are articles that relate to inclusive education published in other journals, the focus of this paper is to illustrate what has been published in this specific journal, being the only one that uses the term in its title.

A total of 640 articles were published during the period 2005–2015 (excluding editorials). These were analysed and classified, taking into account:

(a) The topics of focus; and
(b) The kind of methodologies used.

The analysis identified a number of topics of focus. Table 1 and Figure 1 present the percentages of these different topics.

As can be seen, the biggest proportion of studies focuses on particular groups/categories, particularly disability (21%) and special needs (15%), or a combination of the two (3%). Others are

Table 1. Number of studies and percentages of topics of focus.

Topics	Studies	Percentages (%)
SEN + special education	96	15
Disability	135	21
Ongoing health issues	11	2
Language	12	2
Gay/lesbian	8	1
Broad/all/diversity	54	8
Ethnicity	6	1
Aboriginal	10	2
At risk	10	2
Gender	18	3
HIV	6	1
ADHD	13	2
Autism	19	3
Deaf	5	1
Behaviour	19	3
SEN and disability	17	3
Immigrants and refugees	5	1
Disengagement	5	1
Poverty	8	1
Gypsy/travellers	2	0.3
Space	5	1
Sustainability	3	0.4
Other	61	10
Combination	96	15
Socio-economic	4	1
Asperger	3	0.4
Pedagogies	4	1
Alternative provision	5	1

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and, therefore, do not add up to 100%. ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; SEN, special educational needs.

concerned with a combination of categories (15%), such as gender and disability, ethnic minority and disability, etc. Though the percentages of other groups might seem small, such as ADHD for example (2%), or behaviour (3%), what is important is that if they are all added up, then the percentage rises to 82% of the studies focusing on individual groups/categories. Significantly in terms of my

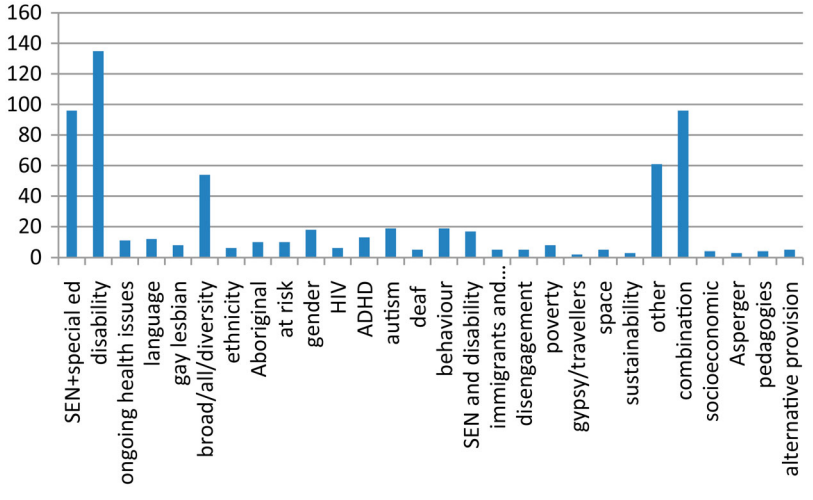

Figure 1. Topics of focus.

argument, studies that focus on all children, or address diversity – which is more compatible to the broad concept of inclusion that I have adopted – make up only 8% of the studies. In addition, 10% of studies is what I called 'other', which relates to issues such as reading interventions and equity.

Moving on, Table 2 and Figure 2 present a summary of the predominant methodological approaches used in the studies. Of course, the sample included both empirical studies and non-empirical studies. This is why a big percentage is based on what I called literature-based or purely theoretical papers.

As can be seen, the majority of studies are qualitative in nature (38%). This makes sense given that when talking about inclusion, we are focusing on a process, such that qualitative methodologies are more appropriate (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Maykut and Morehouse 1994). However, it is also noticeable that very few studies focus on collaborative approaches (3%). In particular, only 20 of the 640 studies were identified which, in some ways, were collaborative in nature. These are presented in a chronological order of publication in Table 3.

By the term collaborative, I mean studies that employ elements of active participation of participants at various levels, from the design of the study through to data collection and analysis. At the same time, due to the participatory nature of such studies, transformation is more likely to occur, as

Table 2. Methodologies used in the studies.

Methodology	Studies	Percentages (%)
Qualitative	246	38
Quantitative	76	12
Mixed methods	51	8
Evaluation	15	2
Literature based	173	27
Collaborative	20	3
Meta-analysis	2	0.3
Policy analysis	15	2
Document analysis	5	1
Textbook analysis	4	1
Project description	20	3
Discourse analysis	5	1
Historical analysis	4	1
Intervention	4	1

Note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and therefore, do not add up to 100%.

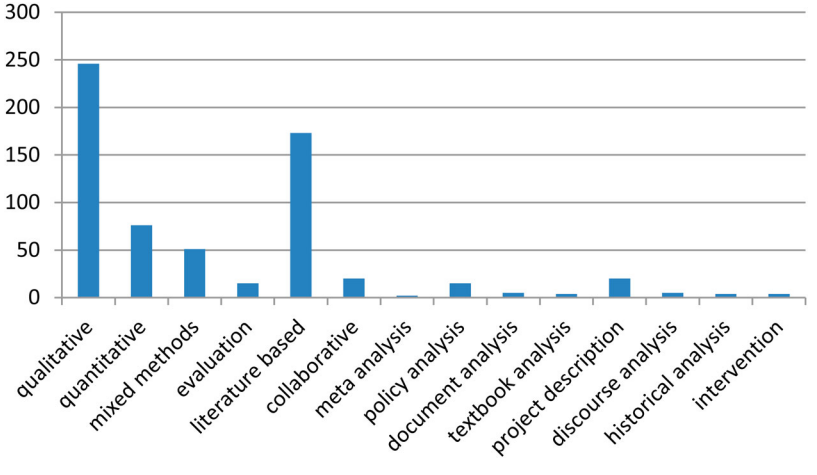

Figure 2. Methodologies used in the studies.

Table 3. Collaborative and transformative studies.

Article	Country
1. Ainscow, Mel, Tony Booth, and Alan Dyson. 2006. "Inclusion and the Standards Agenda: Negotiating Policy Pressures in England." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10 (4–5): 295–308.	England, UK
2. Mueller, Caroline. 2006. "Creating a Joint Partnership: Including Qallunaat Teacher Voices Within Nunavik Education Policy." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10 (4–5): 429–447.	Canada
3. Thomson, Pat, and Helen Gunter. 2008. "Researching Bullying with Students: A Lens on Everyday Life in an 'Innovative School'." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 12 (2): 185–200.	England, UK
4. Carrington, Suzanne, Derek Bland, and Kate Brady. 2010. "Training Young People as Researchers to Investigate Engagement and Disengagement in the Middle Years." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14 (5): 449–462.	Australia
5. Kellock Anne. 2011. "Through the Lens: Accessing Children's Voices in New Zealand on Well-Being." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (1): 41–55.	New Zealand
6. Grieve, Ann M., and Irene Haining. 2011. "Inclusive Practice? Supporting Isolated Bilingual Learners in a Mainstream School." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (7): 763–774.	Scotland, UK
7. Miles, Susie. 2011. "Exploring Understandings of Inclusion in Schools in Zambia and Tanzania Using Reflective Writing and Photography." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (10): 1087–1102.	Zambia and Tanzania
8. Naraian, Srikala, Dianne L. Ferguson, and Natalie Thomas. 2012. "Transforming for Inclusive Practice: Professional Development to Support the Inclusion of Students Labelled as Emotionally Disturbed." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (7): 721–740.	USA
9. Broderick, Alicia A., Greta Hawkins, Stefanie Henze, Corinthia Mirasol-Spath, Rachel Pollack-Berkovits, Holly Prozzo Clune, Elizabeth Skovera, and Christina Steel. 2012. "Teacher Counternarratives: Transgressing and 'Restorying' Disability in Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (8): 825–842.	USA
10. Messiou, Kyriaki. 2012. "Collaborating with Children in Exploring Marginalisation: An Approach to Inclusive Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (12): 1311–1322.	England, UK
11. Morcom, Veronica Elizabeth, and Judith Anne MacCallum. 2012. "Getting Personal About Values: Scaffolding Student Participation Towards an Inclusive Classroom Community." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (12): 1323–1334.	Australia
12. Raphael, Jo, and Andrea C. Allard. 2013. "Positioning People with Intellectual Disabilities as the Experts: Enhancing Pre-Service Teachers' Competencies in Teaching for Diversity." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 17 (2): 205–221.	Australia
13. Wrench, Alison, Cathryn Hammond, Faye McCallum, and Deborah Price. 2013. "Inspire to Aspire: Raising Aspirational Outcomes Through a Student Wellbeing Curricular Focus." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 17 (9): 932–947.	Australia
14. Razer, Michal, Victor J. Friedman, and Boaz Warshofsky. 2013. "Schools as Agents of Social Exclusion and Inclusion." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 17 (11): 1152–1170.	Israel
15. Messiou, Kyriaki. 2014. "Working with Students as Co-Researchers in Schools: A Matter of Inclusion." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18 (6): 601–613.	England, UK
16. Brader, Andy, Allan Luke, Val Klenowski, Stephen Connolly, and Adib Behzadpour. 2014. "Designing Online Assessment Tools for Disengaged Youth." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18 (7): 698–717.	Australia
17. Molyneux, Paul, and Debra Tyler. 2014. "Place-Based Education and Pre-Service Teachers: A Case Study From India." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18 (9): 877–888.	Australia and India
18. Thompson, S. Anthony, Wanda Lyons, and Vianne Timmons. 2015. "Inclusive Education Policy: What the Leadership of Canadian Teacher Associations Has to Say About it." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19 (2): 121–140.	Canada
19. Bristol, Laurette. 2015. "Leading-for-Inclusion: Transforming Action Through Teacher Talk." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19 (8): 802–820.	Australia
20. Messiou, Kyriaki, and Max A. Hope. 2015. "The Danger of Subverting Students' Views in Schools." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19 (10): 1009–1021.	England, UK

opposed to more traditional ways of doing research where, I suggest, the findings mainly have relevance and impact only within the academic community.

Mertens (2015) argues that, on the one hand, the transformative paradigm places central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised groups. On the other hand, such research studies have the potential to reveal how contexts and social actors lead to the marginalisation of some learners and are used to confront oppression, at whichever level it occurs. For my own analysis, it is this second part that interests me the most: forms of research that are concerned with confronting obstacles through the process of research and, therefore, seeking to achieve change in a given context.

In selecting the 20 studies in relation to this approach, I therefore used two criteria: collaborative and transformative. Even though there were studies that were collaborative to some degree, particularly in the methodologies employed (e.g. the use of photography), they were not necessarily

transformative in the sense described above. For example, an excellent study by Kellett (2009), which focused on literacy and poverty, involved a micro-phase in which primary school children engaged in their own child-led research about literacy. This phase was highly collaborative in nature, since the children led the research. However, in the second phase of the study, the macro-phase, researchers themselves analysed the children's findings with a focus on comparing between disadvantaged and affluent schools. Justifications are offered as to why this happened. Instead of involving children in comparing the findings from the two contrasting schools, with the potential dangers of stigmatising individual children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, it was felt that this analysis should be done by adults. This is an issue that directly relates to notions of inclusion and raises the matter of carrying out research ethically.

Kellett's study was therefore not included in these 20 studies, since the transformative aspect seemed to be absent, though the decision made for not using a collaborative approach in the second phase seems appropriate. However, in my view, an engagement with the findings with the school teachers could have promoted a starting point for the transformation of the contexts. Even though this might have happened as part of the project, it is not mentioned in this specific article.

On the other hand, there were other studies which, on first sight, appeared not to have a collaborative element in their design. However, having looked at them more closely, I decided to include them here. For example, a case study by Molyneux and Tyler (2014) was included, whilst other case studies from the 640 were not. This was due to the kind of collaboration used in collecting and analysing data that, in my view, deserved to be classified as being collaborative and differed from others that simply used participants as sources of data collection.

It has to be noted that, even within the 20 studies, levels of collaboration varied. For example, Thompson, Lyons, and Timmons (2015) used a learning collaborative methodology, which, as they explain, involved community and academic research collaboration through four stages: plan, do, study and act. However, in practice, their project only used the first three stages, as they state. In other words, though in principle they believed in the learning collaborative methodology, in practice, they did not seem to follow the process through.

So, to sum up, based on this analysis it seems that the vast majority of articles that focus on inclusive education in this journal:

1. focus on certain categories of people/students (such as SEN and gay/lesbian), and
2. use predominantly qualitative approaches of research, whereas collaborative approaches seem to be used rarely.

These realisations led me to develop an argument about research in the field of inclusive education that I present below. I do this by addressing five questions that I suggest provide a framework for the rethinking that is needed, in order to make research on inclusive education more appropriate to its stated task.

If inclusion is about all, why do we still mostly focus on some?

As can be seen through the review, the majority of studies focus on categories of learners, particularly those deemed as having special educational needs and disabilities. Some would argue that is simply happening because there are still definitions of inclusion used in the field that only focus on these groups of learners. As mentioned above, according to Opertti, Walker, and Zhang (2014), this is still the dominant approach.

One possible explanation for this could be that research has shown that there are some students who need more attention than others, such as those defined as having special educational needs, disabled students, those from ethnic minorities, and those who appear to be disadvantaged by their gender (e.g. Derrington and Kendall 2003; Francis and Skelton 2005; Oliver 1996). Others argue that by understanding and removing the barriers to participation for the most vulnerable groups, education

provision is improved and, therefore, the benefits are for all (Giangreco et al. 2010; Rieser 2011). Meanwhile, Norwich (2014) argues that researchers need to use categories in order to 'sort and describe the groups of children they study' (p.55). This, of course, presupposes a rather traditional stance, where researchers study their 'subjects'. Whatever the justification, my argument is that such approaches are not compatible with those definitions of inclusion that call for a focus on all learners, some of whom may be experiencing difficulties that are invisible or overlooked.

So, I argue that there is a contradiction between broad definitions of inclusion and much of the practice of carrying out research in relation to this theme. For me, this relates to the argument of Slee (2001), who, talking about teacher education, suggests that we must move away from offering discreet special education units and rather focus on studies of difference and identity politics. My argument regarding research orientations and practices is similar: if we really want to promote inclusive schools that will lead to more inclusive societies, research that puts divisions amongst groups and individuals is unlikely to facilitate progress.

Is there a danger that focusing only on some groups of learners, certain assumptions are made about them simply because they fall in a category?

Part of my argument is that by focusing only on 'some' students, researchers tend to make certain assumptions about their participants, simply because they fall within a category, or because they hold a certain label. In other words, researchers who adopt this approach are more likely to have as their starting point an assumption that students falling in certain categories experience similar difficulties and, therefore, deserve to be the focus of attention. Linked to this point, Tomlinson (2012) discusses the dangers of what she calls the 'SEN industry' and highlights that the ideology of special needs, with its focus 'on the supposed deficiencies of individual children, obscured the political, social and economic needs which expanded special education was serving' (17). Similarly, Ainscow (2000) suggests that focusing only on special educational needs can be limiting as an agenda, since it deflects attention from wider contextual factors.

Within any group of learners there might be students who, although holding a certain label, or falling in a specific category, might not experience any difficulties, or might have little in common with others placed within the same category. At the same time, each student has multiple identities, such as their ethnic and gender identities. Ideas of intersectionality which focus on the intersection of identities and, therefore, the need for an engagement with multiple voices (Choo and Ferree 2010; McCall 2005) are relevant to this argument. At the same time, the idea of 'situated identities', which have been defined as 'the attributions that are made about participants in a particular setting as a consequence of their actions' (Alexander and Lauderdale 1977, 225), is also relevant here. In other words, the complex intersection of identities, contexts and situatedness is important for understanding different individuals' experiences.

All of which leads me to argue that adopting categories and labels focus can be dangerous, not least in that certain assumptions might be made about a defined group of learners that might not be true of all of its members. This reminds me of the words of a teacher from a recent project (Messiou et al. 2016; Messiou and Ainscow 2015). Talking about students falling in the group 'white working-class boys', she admitted: 'Of course, we look at diversity – but really we haven't been looking … really looking at individual groups, but not looking at individual children within the group'. This is indicative of how teachers, as well as researchers, when focusing on labels or categories, tend to make certain assumptions about groups seen to share certain characteristics, and, in so doing, possibly forget to look at individuals.

In the English context, another example is the way children entitled to 'free school meals' based on socio-economic indicators lead to the 'pupil premium', which is 'additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers' (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative provision-settings). Ainscow et al. (2016) refer to head teachers in schools who reported

that many pupils entitled to free school meals were doing well educationally, whilst other pupils were in greater need. At the same time, they point out that: 'it would appear that teachers now commonly refer to "pupil premium pupils", as though such a group could be defined meaningfully, when in fact it consists of no more than a highly diverse aggregation of individuals whose only common feature is that they have claimed free school meals' (22). Such approaches entail the dangers of stereotyping, as well as other concerns, as I explain below.

Do researchers contribute to further marginalisation of individuals and groups through own practices, by singling out individuals to carry out research?

If we, as researchers, focus on certain groups of students, such as those defined as having special educational needs, or those from different ethnic backgrounds, then possibly our methodological designs will involve working closely only with those groups of students and, therefore, there is a danger of drawing attention to them as being different from others. Given the preoccupation with ethical issues when doing research these days, at least in English universities, there does not seem to be sufficient articulation of this issue: the possible consequences of our own practices of singling out individuals from their groups to carry out interviews with them, for example. As I have argued in the past (Messiou 2002, 2006), by singling out individuals, there is a danger of signalling to others that they are different in some ways. At the same time, this is problematic, especially in research that aims to promote the ideas of inclusion. In other words, there is sometimes a mismatch between our actions as researchers and our values. As Walton (2011) argues: 'Selecting some children to participate in inclusion research on the basis of disability or other marker of difference undermines the inclusive endeavour' (83).

Of course, I do not want to ignore the fact that we have to be pragmatic when conducting research. This means that there is sometimes a need to focus only on a smaller number of participants as compared to involving all. However, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the approaches used to select representative samples in research are based on predetermined categories, which are to varying degrees social constructs. This seems to me to present some tensions in relation to definitions of inclusion being about all. At the same time, using representative samples and the actual practices of singling participants out from the groups might have negative implications for some, which is not compatible with what researchers who aim to promote inclusion wish to achieve. So, ideally, research that aims to promote inclusion should involve all, but this might be challenging in practical terms. So, if research in inclusive education does focus on some, at least this should be done in sensitive and ethically appropriate ways to avoid the dangers mentioned here. Finally, focusing only on some might mean that we neglect others, which is the next part of my argument.

Is there a danger that we neglect some learners who do not fall into any category, but might equally experience marginalisation?

By focusing on some pupils, there is a danger that we might neglect others who might equally experience marginalisation but do not fall into any predetermined category. This argument relates to my earlier work that illustrates that marginalisation is a loose concept and can be experienced by any child, regardless if he or she falls into predetermined categories or not (Messiou 2006, 2012). In particular, my research identified four ways of conceptualising marginalisation; that is,

1. When a child experiences some kind of marginalisation that is recognised by almost everybody, including himself/herself;
2. When a child feels that he/she is experiencing marginalisation, whereas most of the others do not recognise this;
3. When a child is found in what appears to be marginalised situations but does not feel it, or does not view it as marginalisation and

4. When a child is experiencing marginalisation but does not admit it.

What was distinctive was that not all children who fell in one of those conceptualisations belonged in a predetermined category (such as ethnic minorities and special educational needs). Therefore, this points to the idea that marginalisation can be a subtle process that might be experienced by many learners, some of whom may be hard to identify. It is, therefore, most likely that certain students might have never been participants in a research study; simply because of not belonging in any specific group that is considered to deem special attention. So, even though inclusion is concerned with all, ones that might experience marginalisation might never receive attention.

If inclusion is about facilitating active involvement and participation, why are there so few studies that adopt collaborative approaches?

As seen in the definitions discussed earlier, participation is central to the concept of inclusion. If researchers argue that participation is so essential, why is this not reflected more in their methodological designs? By using the phrase 'working collaboratively', I refer to involving the participants, including students, at various stages of the research from the development of research questions through to collecting and analysing data. Such thinking relates to participatory approaches (Bourke 2009; Nind 2014).

Of course, there are different levels of involvement, as suggested by Hart's (1992) ladder of participation: from tokenistic approaches, to shared decisions between participants and researchers. I argue that many qualitative studies, including ones published in this journal, which focus on understanding the experiences of individuals or groups of students, do enable participation many times. However, for me what is important is how the whole process and the findings of research allow for transformation, rather than just remaining at the level of understanding experiences. The challenges experienced by all children and groups of children in education have been documented strongly in research in various countries. Even though this might be needed as a short-term step towards promoting inclusion, since such focused and exploratory approaches are the predominant ones, as the analysis in this paper indicates, the question is: How much more understanding is needed before we move into action through research?

Implications of using collaborative approaches in relation to inclusive education

So, to sum up, my main argument in this paper is:

If inclusion is about presence, participation and achievement of all, then:

(a) we should aim to involve all learners, rather than focusing only on some; and
(b) we should employ collaborative transformative approaches of research in order to facilitate presence, participation and achievement.

I now focus on the second aspect of this argument, in order to illustrate the benefits and challenges involved in using collaborative approaches.

Firstly, as already argued, focusing on all learners rather than on some is more compatible with the ideas of inclusion. Secondly, research that adopts such collaborative transformative approaches has the potential to have a direct impact on participants. For example, Thomson and Gunter (2008) focused on exploring bullying in schools and employed a collaborative participatory approach with some student researchers. In particular, groups of students were involved in research training, and collected and analysed data in their school. The students collaborated with researchers and their teachers to carry out the research, and photography was used as a means of collecting data. As the authors argue, their findings have relevance to the notion of inclusion more broadly. What is also

interesting here is that the project facilitated the school's reform process, through a specific set of actions such as the setting up of student parliament in the school.

More importantly, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson's article (2006b) refers to work carried out with a network of schools, showing the ways in which the schools' practices were transformed as a result of the collaborative action research that took place. The cameos presented in the article are illustrative of the impact that this approach had on the participating schools, which is in line with the ideas of transformative practice. For me, perhaps more than any other example, this points to what is needed in order to promote inclusive thinking and practice: research where researchers dare to spare considerable amounts of time in schools, making sure that there is an impact on thinking and practices within these contexts, as well as providing research knowledge that has wider implications. What distinguishes such studies from others is the active involvement of participants, whilst at the same time seeking a direct impact on participants and their organisations. In this way, findings are more likely to be meaningful and relevant, to both practitioners and researchers.

It is worth adding that in the UK context, where impact is something that is gaining more importance from research funding bodies, on the one hand, and from the Research Excellence Framework (which determines the allocation of research funds in universities), on the other hand, it is likely that in the near future, there will be calls for an increase in research that uses such approaches. Similarly, funding from the European Union now requires a focus on impact in the application processes.

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that there remain challenges in using such approaches. Research that involves authentic collaboration with participants is complicated. In particular, it is time consuming and involves a lot of commitment on the part of researchers, as well as on the part of participants. Focusing especially on work in schools, this becomes even more complicated given the busy school contexts and the fact that researchers have to fit around these schedules. For a further discussion of the challenges involved, see Messiou et al. (2016).

Finally, approaches such as these directly relate to Griffiths's (1998) argument for kinds of research that promote social justice: 'research in which the methodology or epistemology of the research is itself a reason for claiming it to be research for social justice' (26). And, to return to the definition used at the beginning of this paper, in relation to school practices in particular, such approaches can influence the presence, participation and achievement of all students, as illustrated in some of the examples above. They also demonstrate the sorts of values that we hold as researchers and the ethical ways in which we set out to conduct our research. In this respect, it is encouraging to see in Table 3 that, more recently, there seems to be a noticeable increase in the studies that adopt such approaches: 17 of the 20 studies have been published over the last five years. Therefore, it seems that such approaches might start to be used more widely gradually.

At the same time, as my analysis demonstrates, there seems to be a dearth of studies that are collaborative and attempt to be transformative, with the majority of studies being qualitative, quantitative and literature based. I believe that it is time to redress this balance. Having said this, I respect the need for research and methodological designs that are fit for purpose in relation to the research questions that scholars are trying to address. For example, Griffiths (1998) refers to research that directly focuses on social justice issues, such as Gillborn and Gipps's (1996) study that focused on achievement and pupils from ethnic minorities, and entailed a review of existing research.

I believe that this kind of work is necessary. However, my argument is that if we are adopting the definitions that I outlined, we should be aiming towards more collaborative and transformative approaches. Such kind of research has been shown to be in a position to bring about changes (e.g. Ainscow 2015; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006a; Hopkins 2008). Some good examples that directly relate to social justice and partnerships in research that brought about change in schools are those described in the edited book of Atweh, Kemmis, and Weeks (1998), where researchers worked in collaboration with participants to understand social justice issues (such as gender) and bring about changes in the specific contexts (e.g. Marshall, Cobb, and Ling 1998; Brooker et al. 1998).

A final thought

Tomlinson, in her influential book '*A Sociology of Special Education*', published in 1982, asked whether there are vested interests of expanding groups of professionals and practitioners served by the 'discovery' of more and more children with special needs. Similarly, I ask the question: are there vested interests on the part of researchers, in carrying on with category-based approaches and traditional ways of doing research, under the name of inclusive education? If the answer is yes, then research in the field of inclusive education has largely failed to achieve its stated aims.

Slee (2011), the editor of this journal, argues that 'inclusive education invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer and our role in shaping both of those worlds' (14). My argument is that it is our role as researchers to play a part in shaping these worlds. This can be achieved by transforming existing patterns of thinking and practice through collaborative approaches when doing research, in order to develop more inclusive practices. The first step is for researchers to reconsider their own thinking and positions as to where they truly stand in relation to inclusive education. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it is about articulating our own values and how these impact on our practices. Are researchers in the field of inclusive education prepared for such a rethink and changes in the way of working?

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