



## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: A KEY-AREA FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND TEACHER SKILLS

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### Abstract:

This article constitutes a literature review on inclusive education for inclusive school development. Inclusive education supports a holistic and sustainable approach to learning for all and combines all fields of knowledge and experience. The focus of this paper is to explore the theoretical interrelation between inclusive education and sustainable philosophy. Prevention education can be a key educational process for the sustainability of inclusive education. The review examines issues, as it is necessary to develop data that will contribute to a more comprehensive description of these modern educational trends and will help to develop appropriate school materials on inclusive education and learning for all. The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth et al., 2006) is a set of materials to guide schools through the inclusive process in the 21st century with emphasis on the social model of disability. Further, the review examines to shed light on the skills of teachers. The purpose of this study is to review recent theoretical approaches and new data that would promote teacher education for inclusion.

**Keywords:** special and inclusive education, inclusive philosophy, inclusive development, learning for all, sustainability, skills, inclusion, social model of disability, prevention, exclusion

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## 1. Introduction

The emphasis on the inclusion of diverse learners presents challenges to teachers, particularly those whose understandings have been framed by notions of special education for children with disabilities (Petriwskyj, 2010). Inclusive education is a new approach toward educating children, youth and adults with diverse abilities. The purpose of this article is to offer thoughts on Inclusive education within contemporary concepts for inclusive school development and to shed light on the skills of teachers. Also, the focus of this paper is to explore the theoretical interrelation between the Inclusive education and sustainable philosophy. Data are used to highlight the importance of prevention in educational settings. Prevention education (Ioannidi, 2002) can be a key educational process for the sustainability of inclusive education. It is necessary to develop data that will contribute to a more comprehensive description of these modern educational trends and will help to develop appropriate school materials on inclusive education. The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth et al., 2006) is a set of materials to guide schools through an inclusive process in the 21st century.

## 2. Special and Inclusive Education: from deinstitutionalization to the prevention

Special and inclusive education includes actions at primary, secondary and tertiary level (Heward, 2011, p. 18). Typically, students who are experiencing difficulty learning in the classroom are referred for long-term assistance to remedial or special education services (Askew et al., 2002). However, the label of Special Educational Needs plays a significant role in extending to a much greater number of people an educational rationale for failure (Armstrong et al., 2010). For example, the label for children within the re-education mechanism of Treatment Institutions (tertiary prevention) can lead to school and social exclusion.

According to Ioannidi (2001), the idea of a real educational treatment system which would focus on the rehabilitation of juveniles with social difficulties failed as the Institutions could not keep up with the general progressive ideas and the need for an educational structure that would support young delinquents to participate in equal terms in the various social activities. Due to this failure, the Treatment Institutions have reached a critical point for their existence and function. One has to seek the causes of this phenomenon to the social and political control structures of thought and action that undermine the function of any educational treatment in the Institutions. As a consequence, the provided treatment in the Treatment Institutions is doubted. However, under current social and ideological standards the abolition of Treatment Institutions is a utopia. So alternative measures of a more educational and social nature are proposed. Two perspectives on education, inclusive education and education for sustainable development are both perspectives that have been paid much attention to over the last decades (Ioannidi, 2006).

### **3. Inclusive education, sustainable philosophy and teacher skills: definitions and considerations**

In fact, education is a key vehicle for achieving sustainability goals (UNESCO, 1996). So, *“the notion of sustainability is important in order to advance debates on the perennial character of the process of change within the context of inclusion”* (Liasidou, 2015). Today, *“educational systems face various challenges: globalisation, the fourth industrial revolution, a global recession, and global mobility. As a result, they have to become inclusive of diversity to bring about a sustainable philosophy of social change”* (Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021a/ Sorkos & Hajisoteriou, 2021b).

In fact, inclusive education is defined as *“full inclusion”* (Sailer et al., 2018) and *“Inclusive Education is both a vision and a practice”* (Villa & Thousand, 2016). It has been established that the effectiveness of inclusive education is substantiated in practices which are based on real existing inclusive values: equity, equality, communality and respect for diversity. It is concluded that the sustainability of inclusive education coincides with the real existence of inclusive values in practice, equally applying to all students (Galkienė, 2021). According to Ainscow et al. (2006), *“a definition of inclusion should touch upon issues of equity, participation, community, entitlement, compassion, respect for diversity and sustainability”*.

The issue of inclusion has to be framed within the context of the wider international discussions around the United Nations organisations agenda of Education For All. The Education for All movement is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Inclusive education is a new approach to educating children with diverse abilities. Inclusion is not an experiment to be tested but a value to be followed. Inclusive education is also an integral part of Education for all. It is necessary to look into how schools can be modified or changed to make sure that the education is relevant to the local context, includes and treats all pupils with respect and is flexible so that all can participate (Hasan et al., 2018). Therefore, the link between inclusion and sustainability is both useful and necessary in today's world. Examples will be shown which offer an approach to how inclusive practice goes hand in hand with sustainability education for all, in and beyond schools.

The Oxford Dictionary definition of sustain is ‘to maintain or keep going continuously’ (Jermyn, 2004). *“Promoting inclusion means stimulating discussion, encouraging positive attitudes and improving educational and social frameworks to cope with new demands in education structures and governance. It involves improving inputs, processes and environments to foster learning both at the level of the learner in his/her learning environment and at the system level to support the entire learning experience. Its achievement rests on governments’ willingness and capacities to adopt pro-poor policies, addressing issues of equity in public expenditures on education, developing intersectoral linkages and approaching inclusive education as a constituent element of lifelong learning”* (UNESCO, 2009).

The focus should in fact be on the characteristics of each individual and how each person can learn more and better by being part of a collective learning space with peers

and teachers (<https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/glossary/inclusive-education>). According to Kirschners (2015), inclusive education is an approach to schooling in which students with many different kinds of disabilities and learning needs are educated in classes with non-disabled and typically developing students. In an inclusive arrangement, students who need additional support and services spend most of their time with their non-disabled peers rather than in separate classrooms or schools.

In addition, inclusive education supports a holistic and sustainable approach to learning for all and combines all fields of knowledge and experience (social, pedagogical, aesthetic, literary, technological, ethical, etc.). Under this holistic and global approach to educational reality, inclusive philosophy emphasizes the skills of teachers. Because education through skills (European Skills Agenda) (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1223>) changes the way we know, live, influence, cultivate, that we interact, that we include, that we protect the next generations (<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1511&langId=en>). Specifically, the term "skills" is generally used to describe what a person knows, understands and can do. It is a fact that skills must be strengthened throughout life (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381&qid=1604504646165&from=EL>). The acquisition of skills contributes to teachers updating their professional profile and developing in all learning environments ([https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teachers-europe-carreers-development-and-well-being\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/teachers-europe-carreers-development-and-well-being_en)), as well as to keep the pedagogical interaction in an inclusive context.

Therefore, and given that researches focus on the insufficient skills of teachers, especially in online environments (Sakellariou, 2022, p. 76), an important element of inclusive education involves all teachers being prepared to teach all students. Inclusion cannot happen unless educators own the power of change, with values, knowledge and attitudes that enable every student to succeed (UNESCO, 2020).

Also, research analysis indicated that the majority of training programmes focused on attitude, knowledge and skills, because the implementation of inclusive education creates challenges for classroom teachers who have to meet the learning needs of students with and without special educational needs (SEN) (Kurniawati, 2014).

So, the most significant 21st century skills that a teacher should possess to build a knowledge society include higher-order thinking skills, life skills, management of students' abilities, supporting the management of information technology, management of teaching, and management of the evaluation system etc. (Alhothali, 2021).

In this context, new forms of pedagogical intervention are required, such as the role of the inclusive teacher, who mediates positively, collaboratively, with respect for diversity and in support of all students. Four fundamental values regarding teaching and learning have been identified as an inclusive philosophy and education for all. These four core values are: 1. Valuing student diversity – student diversity is seen as a rich source of information and an asset to education 2. Supporting all students – teachers have high expectations for the achievement of goals for all students 3. Working with others –

collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers 4. Continuous personal and professional development – teachers are responsible for continuous education and learning them ([https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile\\_of\\_inclusive\\_teachers\\_el.pdf](https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile_of_inclusive_teachers_el.pdf)).

According to Forlin (2010), the inclusion of all learners regardless of specific educational needs into regular schools continues to be promoted as the best option for ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all. Preparation of teachers during their initial training programs should, therefore, be providing a suitable foundation to enable them to support this aim. At least at a minimal level newly graduated teachers should have the understanding that their role will require them to differentiate the curriculum and their pedagogy to ensure that all learners within their classes will be able to access an appropriate education.

It is a fact that educational policy and prevention strategies require the mobilization of the society in a practical and participatory style, in a climate of mutual respect and shared responsibility in a universal world (Mavroidis & Petrou, 2004, p. 427), where the value of cooperation through groups in combination with the individual responsibility are recognized (Olweus, 2009).

#### **4. Index for Inclusion: one tool for learning for all**

The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth et al., 2006) is a set of materials to guide schools through a process of inclusive school development (Norwich et al., 2003). It is about building supportive communities and fostering high achievement for all staff and students. The Index takes the social model of disability as its starting point, builds on good practice, and then organises the Index work around a cycle of activities which guide schools through the stages of preparation, investigation, development and review. The materials are organised in three dimensions: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive practices. Inclusive education involves (<http://www.csie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-index-explained.shtml>):

- Valuing all students and staff equally.
- Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools.
- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in the locality.
- Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as 'having special educational needs'.
- Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of particular students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely.
- Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome.
- Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their locality.

- Improving schools for staff as well as for students.
- Emphasising the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as in increasing achievement.
- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities.
- Recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.

Finally, the Index for Inclusion is an effective tool to support a more inclusive response to diversity in schools (Carrington & Duke, 2014). In the Index, inclusion is an approach to education and childcare (Booth et al., 2006). According to Vaughan (2010), the Index for Inclusion is a resource to support the inclusive development of schools. The materials in the Index are designed to build on the wealth of knowledge and experience that people already have in their schools and to challenge any school to move forward, regardless of how inclusive it is. From the start the language in the Index is deeply inclusionary, replacing the term 'special educational needs' with 'barriers to learning and participation'. It invites a school to reduce those barriers by working through a cycle of activities to gather information about the school's cultures, policies and practices and to set new priorities for development after undergoing deep scrutiny of everything that makes up the life of the school.

## 5. Conclusion

Arguments for inclusive education are well documented and rest on notions of equality, human rights, learning for all and sustainability. Much more than a policy requirement, inclusion is founded upon a moral position which values and respects every individual and which welcomes diversity as a rich learning resource. At a time when the educational landscape is rapidly changing, with schools having to provide for learners of increasingly diverse abilities and family, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, respect and equal commitment to all learners seem more important than ever (<http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/index.shtml>).

Finally, people around the globe recognise that the current development trends are clearly unsustainable and that education can be seen as a critical tool for advancing our society towards sustainability (Hemani & Punecar, 2015). In total, *"inclusive education refers to the right of all people to education, guaranteeing the presence, participation, and progress of all students and, above all, equal opportunities"* (Medina-García et al., 2020). According to UNESCO (2009), *"inclusion is thus seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education"*.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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