Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity 8

Jordi Collet
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Global Inclusive Education

Lessons from Spain

Springer

Inclusive Learning and Educational Equity

Volume 8

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Aims and Scope:

This book series reflects on the challenges of inclusive education as a strategy for improving educational equity. The series addresses issues of diversity in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which set the global education agenda for 2030 in SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Although considered an important aspect of a global human rights agenda ensuring education for all is a complex endeavour that is subject to the forces of globalization, and the exclusionary pressures associated with migration, mobility, language, ethnicity, disability, and intergenerational poverty. Acknowledgement of the reciprocal links between these markers of diversity and educational underachievement has led to an increasing interest in the development of inclusive education as a strategy for improving educational equity.

By addressing these and related diversity issues, this series aims to contribute important advances in knowledge about the enactment of inclusive education. The development of educational processes and pedagogical interventions that respond to the tensions between education policies that promote competition and those designed to promote inclusion at individual, classroom, school, district, national, and international levels are explored by the contributors to this series.

This series:

- Offers a critical perspective on current practice.
- Stimulates and challenges further developments for the field.
- Explores global disparities in educational provision and compares developments.
- Provides a welcome addition to the literature on inclusive education.

Jordi Collet • Mila Naranjo
Jesús Soldevila-Pérez
Editors

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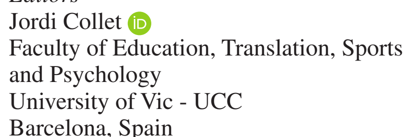
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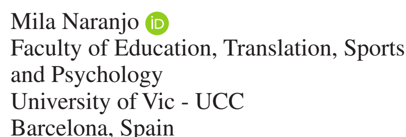
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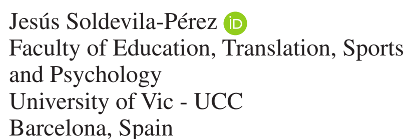
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Foreword

I first visited Spain for professional purposes in 1984 as a member of a group of specialists from the United Kingdom invited to advise on how the country could make progress in promoting the integration of children defined as having special needs. It was an exciting period as the country introduced a massive programme of educational reforms that would support the development of democracy in the period following the death of Franco.

At that time, my friend Álvaro Marchesi was Secretary of State for Education and was driving an impressive programme of innovations. Later, in 1994, he was to be centrally involved in the organisation of the groundbreaking Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education, which stimulated an international movement for the promotion of inclusive education that continues to the present day (see UNESCO, 2020).

Since that time, Spain has continued to be a scene of innovations in respect to the idea of inclusive education, and I have been fortunate to have a small role in some of the initiatives that have been taken. Many of these have involved authors who present their ideas in this splendid volume.

Reflecting on my own experiences in Spain, I recall a splendid collaborative action research project involving a network of schools in Catalonia, carried out alongside Climent Giné from Ramon Llull University. I also remember working on a similar initiative with Pilar Arnaiz from the University of Murcia. Later, I was involved with my late and much missed friend Carlos Ruiz Amador in a system-wide development to introduce the *Index for Inclusion* in the Basque Country.

Then, since 2012, I have been a partner alongside my colleagues Gerardo Echeita, Marta Sandoval and Cecilia Simon at the Autonomous University of Madrid in an international programme of research that led to the development of a new approach, 'Inclusive Inquiry' (Messiou & Ainscow, 2020). This involves teachers entering into dialogues with children, and with their colleagues about how to develop lessons that respond positively to learner differences. Central to the strategy is the involvement of students as researchers, gathering information from their classmates to assist in processes of lesson planning.

More recently, I have collaborated with Ignacio Calderón from the University of Malaga on a series of initiatives in Latin America. His insights into exclusionary pressures faced by some students and families in Spain have been particularly illuminating.

These and other experiences have led me to reflect on my own *'lessons from Spain',* as I explain in what follows.

Lesson 1: Context Matters My varied experiences in a diverse range of Spanish contexts have confirmed for me that, in promoting inclusive education, we must take account of contextual factors. I note, for example, the different cultural and linguistic traditions that exist, as well as varied education policies, across its 17 autonomous regions.

This means that we cannot simply lift approaches that have proved to be effective in one part of Spain and introduce them elsewhere. Rather, it is necessary to focus attention on the barriers experienced by some children that lead them to become marginalized as a result of particular contextual factors, such as inappropriate curricula and forms of assessment, and inadequate teacher preparation and support.

The implication is that overcoming such barriers is the most important means of development forms of education that are effective for all children. In this way, the focus on inclusion can become a way of achieving the overall improvement of education systems (Ainscow, 2020).

Lesson 2: Evidence Is Crucial It follows that evidence is vital in order to address concerns about access and equity within education systems. In particular, it is important to know who is included, who is segregated and who is excluded from schooling within particular contexts. For example, in various parts of Spain, I have seen how children from Gypsy families are educated in segregated settings.

Evidence is needed in relation to the many different forms that exclusion can take, such as:

- *Exclusion as a result of the personal circumstances needed for learning*, e.g. living under conditions inadequate for health and well-being, such as poor housing, food and clothing, living with limited security and safety
- *Exclusion from entry into a school,* e.g. being unable to pay entrance fees and tuition fees, being outside the eligibility criteria for entry, and dressing in ways considered inadmissible by a school
- *Exclusion from regular participation in schools or an educational programme*, e.g. being too far away to attend regularly, being unable to pay for participation, and being sick or injured.
- *Exclusion from meaningful learning experiences,* e.g. teaching and learning processes that do not take account of learner differences; the language of instruction and learning materials not comprehensible; and learners going through uncomfortable, negative and/or discouraging experiences at school, e.g. discrimination, prejudice, bullying and violence.

- *Exclusion from a recognition of learning progress,* e.g. learning acquired in a non-formal programme not recognised for entry to a formal programme, learning acquired not considered admissible for certification and learning acquired not considered valid for accessing further learning opportunities. (Adapted from UNESCO, 2012, p. 3).

Engaging with evidence regarding these many challenging issues, some of which are difficult to identify, has the potential to stimulate the search for effective ways of promoting the participation and progress of all students.

Lesson 3: Draw on Untapped Potential My experiences in different regions of Spain confirm my view that schools and their local communities always have untapped potential to improve their capacity for improving the achievement of all of their students, not least those from economically poorer backgrounds and other vulnerable groups. The challenge therefore is to mobilise this potential. This reinforces the argument that moves towards the promotion of inclusive practices involve a social process that requires practitioners to learn from one another, from their students and from others involved in the lives of the young people they teach.

The starting point for developing inclusive practices is usually with the sharing of existing approaches through collaboration amongst staff, leading to experimentation with new practices that will reach out to all students (Ainscow, 2016). This requires the development of a common language with which colleagues can talk to one another and, indeed, to themselves, about detailed aspects of their practice. Without such a language, teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities (Huberman, 1993).

A framework that can help in the promotion of an inclusive dialogue within a school is provided by the *Index for Inclusion*, a review instrument developed originally for use in England but now available in many countries (CSIE, 2012). The *Index* is intended to help draw on the knowledge and views of teachers, students, parents/carers and community representatives about barriers to participation that exist within the existing *'cultures, policies and practices'* of schools in order to identify priorities for change. In connecting inclusion with the detail of policy and practice, the *Index* encourages those who use it to build their own view of inclusion, related to their experience and values, as they work out which policies and practices they wish to promote or discourage.

Lesson 4: The Importance of Clarity In Spain, as in many other countries, inclusive education is still often thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. This presumes that the aim of it is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. In the UNESCO Guide that I coordinated, we sum this up as follows: *'Every learner matters and matters equally'* (UNESCO, 2017).

This means that, in an education system based on the principle of inclusion, all students should be assessed on an on-going basis in relation to their progress through the curriculum. This allows teachers to respond to a wide range of individual learners, bearing in mind that each learner is unique. It means that teachers and other professionals must be well informed about their students' characteristics and attainments, while also assessing broader qualities, such as their capacity for cooperation. However, the ability to identify each student's stage of development, or to enumerate certain student's particular difficulties, is not enough. Teachers in inclusive systems need to gauge the effectiveness of their teaching for all of their students and should know what they need to do to enable each student to learn as well as possible.

Lesson 5: Involve the Wider Community In order to foster inclusion in education, governments need to mobilise human and financial resources, some of which may not be under their direct control. Forming partnerships among key stakeholders who can support and own the process of change is therefore essential (Calderón-Almendros et al., 2020). These stakeholders include: parents/caregivers; teachers and other education professionals; teacher trainers and researchers; national, local and school-level administrators and managers; policymakers and service providers in other sectors (e.g. health, child protection and social services); civic groups in the community; and members of minority groups that are at risk of exclusion.

Family involvement is particularly crucial, and the strong tradition of family cohesion in Spain opens up many possibilities for making this happen. In some countries, parents and education authorities already cooperate closely in developing community-based programmes for certain groups of learners, such as those who are excluded because of their gender, social status or impairments (Miles, 2002). A logical next step is for these parents to become involved in supporting change for developing inclusion in schools.

All of this means changing how families and communities work, and enriching what they offer to children. In this respect, there are many encouraging examples of what can happen when what schools do is aligned in a coherent strategy with the efforts of other local players – employers, community groups, universities and public services (Kerr et al., 2014). This does not necessarily mean schools doing more, but it does imply partnerships beyond the school, where partners multiply the impacts of each other's efforts.

Lesson 6: Everybody Has to Work Together The lessons from my Spanish experiences have implications for the various key stakeholders within education systems. In particular, teachers, especially those in senior positions, have to see themselves as having a wider responsibility for all children, not just those that attend their own schools. They also have to develop patterns of internal organisation that enable them to have the flexibility to cooperate with other schools and with stakeholders beyond the school gate. It seems to me that such thinking is particularly relevant in Spain, with its strong cultural tradition of community cohesion and mutual support.

Looking elsewhere, this approach reflects the principles underpinning the highly acclaimed Harlem Children's Zone in the USA (Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). This initiative involves efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in areas of disadvantage through an approach that is characterised as being 'doubly holistic'. That is to say, it seeks to develop coordinated efforts to tackle the factors that disadvantage children and enhance the factors which support them, across all aspects of their lives, and across their life spans, from conception through to adulthood. Dobbie and Fryer (2009) describe the Children's Zone as 'arguably the most ambitious social experiment to alleviate poverty of our time' (p. 1).

Lesson 7: Schools Can Learn from One Another I have seen many examples in Spain of the power of school-to-school collaboration. They show how such partnerships can strengthen the capacity of individual schools to respond to learner diversity.

This echoes the findings of research elsewhere which suggests that collaboration between schools can help to reduce the polarisation of schools to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalised at the edges of the system (Ainscow, 2016). In addition, there is evidence that when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work. Specifically, comparisons of practices in different schools can lead teachers to view underachieving students in a new light. In this way, learners who cannot easily be educated within the school's established routines are not seen as 'having problems', but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible.

Certain conditions are necessary in order to make school-to-school collaboration effective (Ainscow et al., 2020). In summary, these are as follows:

- The development of positive relationships amongst groups of schools, in some instances across the borders of local authorities
- The presence of incentives that encourage key stakeholders to explore the possibility that collaboration will be in their own interests
- Senior staff in schools who are willing and skilled enough to drive collaboration forward towards collective responsibility, whilst coping with the inevitable uncertainties and turbulence
- The creation of common improvement agendas that are seen to be relevant to a wide range of stakeholders

It is also helpful to have coherent external support provided by credible consultants/advisers who have the confidence to learn alongside their school-based partners, exploring and developing new roles and relationships where necessary.

Lesson 8: Local Coordination Is Essential A recent report noted that four of the most successful national education systems – Singapore, Estonia, Finland, and Ontario – each has a coherent 'middle tier', regardless of their differing extents of school autonomy or devolution of decision-making (Bubb et al., 2019). In particular, they all have district-level structures that offer a consistent view that, to maintain

equity as well as excellence, there needs to be an authoritative coordinating influence with local accountability. My experiences suggest that there is considerable variation across Spain regarding this factor. Indeed, it is an aspect of policy that might well benefit from close attention.

Having analysed two relatively successful large-scale improvement initiatives, Andy Hargreaves and I have suggested a way of supporting local authorities in responding to these new demands (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). We argue that, in taking on new roles, districts can provide a valuable focus for school improvement, be a means for efficient and effective use of research evidence and data analysis across schools, support schools in responding coherently to multiple external reform demands, and be champions for families and students, making sure everybody gets a fair deal.

Final Thoughts These, then, are my eight lessons from Spain. Alongside experiences in other parts of the world, they suggest that the promotion of inclusion in education is less about the introduction of particular techniques or new organisational arrangements and much more about processes of social learning within particular contexts (Ainscow, 2020). As I have argued, the use of evidence as a means of stimulating experimentation and collaboration is seen as a central strategy. Indeed, Copland (2003) suggests that inquiry can be the 'engine' to enable the distribution of leadership that is needed in order to foster participation in learning, and the 'glue' that can bind a community together around a common purpose.

All of this has major implications for leadership practice within schools and across education systems. In particular, it calls for efforts to encourage coordinated and sustained efforts around the idea that changing outcomes for vulnerable groups of students requires changes in thinking and practices amongst adults.

It seems to me that the chapters in this book speak to us about all of these matters in ways that will stimulate and challenge our assumptions. In particular, they illustrate what is possible when stakeholders come together to address the barriers experienced by some of our children and young people, a message that comes through loud and clear across the chapters in this book.

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Series Editor's Preface

This book explores how a global goal can be addressed by local initiatives, turning the familiar call for action – 'think global, act local' – on its head. Through an examination of local acts, the contributors to this volume show how they can be illustrative of global thinking about policy imperatives. In the case of inclusive education, these imperatives are summed up in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all.*

However, concepts such as 'inclusive', 'equitable' and 'quality' are hard to pin down. Historic socio-cultural and regional differences between educational jurisdictions give rise to distinctions in how these concepts are defined and enacted within educational systems. These systems are also known to vary in terms of how they are organized and who has access to them (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). In addition, significant disparities between jurisdictions on global measures of inequality mean that what is needed to achieve the promise of SDG 4 also varies. These variations obscure the common goals of inclusive education, leading to claims that it is conceptually weak (Göranssona & Nilholm, 2014). An alternative view considers variation a call for more extensive theorising about what has been learned about the processes of inclusion and exclusion in education (Florian, 2014).

By exploring how the concept of inclusion is portrayed in everyday ways, from the classroom to the community, the contributors to this volume map the complexities of *enacting* the concepts associated with inclusion. The editors have theorised these findings by presenting a Global Inclusive Education (GIE) framework that structures the analysis of the studies that are reported in the book. This enables the reader to reflect globally on the Spanish experience within five dimensions of analysis and action that can be connected to policy and practice elsewhere.

As the editors note: *research on inclusive education in Spain [is] in dialogue with the rest of Europe and the world, in its globality and complexity.* Such dialogue is as important as it is useful when representations of inclusion are underpinned by universal principles as they are in this volume. The challenge lies in determining the extent to which the enactment of any principled approach can be substantiated in practice when it is represented in different ways (Florian, 2014, 2021).

Global policy frameworks facilitate the development of local practice, but local practice authenticates global policy. As this volume makes clear, inclusion is integrative at the levels of classroom, school, families, and community. Local thinking and practice offered within a coherent framework based on common dimensions and universal principles inspires stakeholders at all levels across global regions and jurisdictions to practice the art of the possible with confidence in its connection to developments elsewhere. In taking this stance, the book adds coherence to the long-standing debate about conceptual clarity to the field of inclusive education.

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