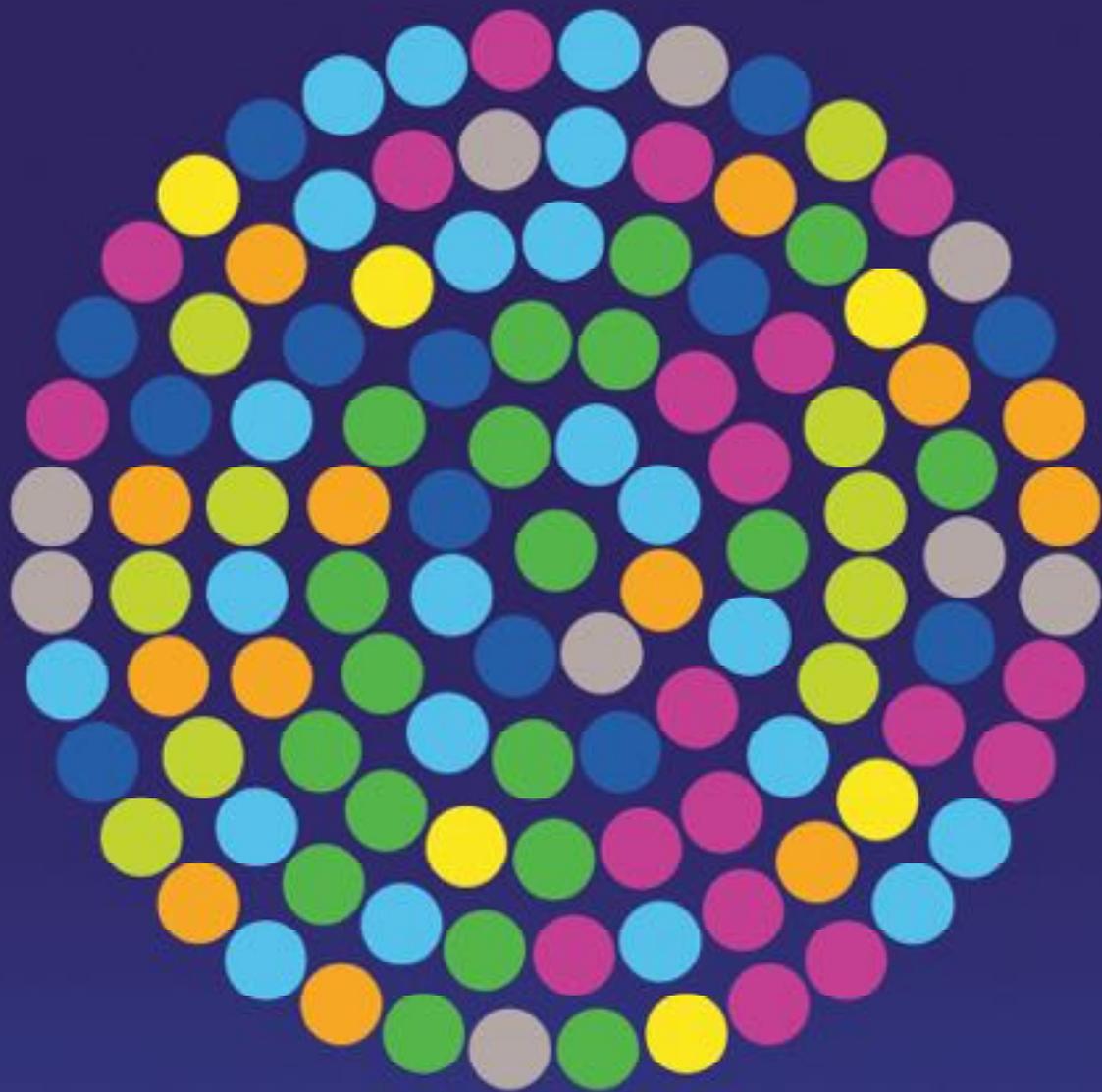


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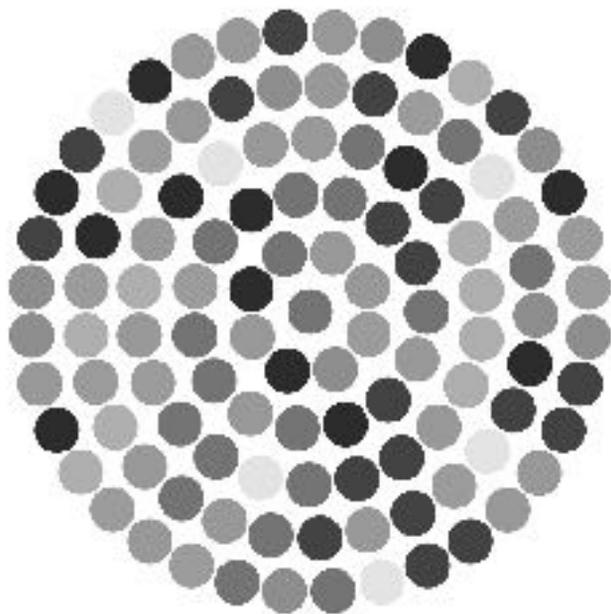
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

© Linda J. Graham

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CHAPTER 1

Inclusive education in the 21st century

LINDA J. GRAHAM

We've been talking about 'inclusion' for a long time. The concept became internationally recognised during the 1990s, even if it was largely misunderstood. It was first articulated with material force through the Salamanca Statement in 1994, and the world responded by reframing education policies and updating practice, taking on small isolated parts of the giant puzzle that is school education, one at a time. Through processes that could only be described as incremental and unsystematic, 'inclusion' then became a smokescreen for everything it was meant to replace and instead of engineering a fundamental rethink of how we do school education, twentieth-century schooling continued relatively undisturbed (Graham & Slee 2008). Although many schools are more culturally and linguistically diverse than they were in the 1980s, this change really reflects social transformation as an outcome of globalisation, mass migration and multiculturalism. By and large, schools cannot escape social transformation, for their enrolments are determined by their geography. Although there are students who travel across town to private, selective or special schools, most still attend their local school and, over time, those schools have come to reflect the diversity of their local communities.

While most students still do attend their local school, enrolment statistics present an objective counterstory to the popular belief that our local schools are 'inclusive'. Some schools serving new migrant communities in the outer-metropolitan areas of our capital cities

may excel at being culturally inclusive, but those same schools do not necessarily excel at inclusive education. The two are related, but they are not one and the same. Although acceptance of and responsiveness to *all* forms of human diversity—including cultural diversity—is a central element of inclusive education, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and no one part can ever constitute the whole. That said, this book unapologetically focuses on the inclusion of students with disability, because the practices that make schools inclusive for students with disability—such as universal design and accessible pedagogies—benefit all students (see Chapters 3 and 8). Research also shows that segregation is harmful (Oh-Young & Filler 2015). Therefore, while city schools with very high percentages of students from a language background other than English may claim to be inclusive, this cannot be true if they segregate students with disability in special-education units or if they advise parents of those students that they would be better served in a special school.

Despite progress in places such as New Brunswick (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013), the segregation of students with disability has increased in countries such as England, the United States and Australia, each of which once played a role in progressing the inclusive education movement. These increases in segregation and the way segregation takes form look different across the world, but similarities can be found. Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in England, ‘behaviour schools’ in New South Wales and Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) in Victoria, for example, all share similar DNA in that they enrol students with learning and behavioural difficulties whose social, emotional and academic needs have not been met in the primary phase of schooling. The rationale for alternative provision is that these students have failed to thrive in mainstream schools and that *they* are deficient, not the system that failed them. The new flexi-centres being developed in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory are another version of the same tired idea, which is framed as a therapeutic response to damaged and damaging young people. This benevolent framing is reinforced by uncritical researchers and other commentators who maintain—erroneously—that

these settings are a form of inclusion. This Orwellian ‘Newspeak’ has progressed so far that in-school suspension centres have been renamed ‘Inclusion Units’ in England and put forward as an inclusion strategy (Bloom 2017). Rarely do proponents of such strategies examine their longitudinal outcomes or the cracks within the general educational system that fuel their number. Note that these ‘alternative’ settings exist in addition to traditional special schools, special-education units and classes, the ranks of which are also expanding with the development of autism-specific (but still segregated) schools, units and classes. Common across these settings, whether they are run by government, private or not-for-profit providers, is their role in sustaining an inflexible twentieth-century education system that was built with only particular students in mind. This system is what we call ‘the mainstream’.

The Mainstream

If we are ever to realise inclusive education, there are some things that we must get straight. Language is one of them. Too often, the terms ‘inclusive’ and ‘mainstream’ are used interchangeably, when they are, in fact, mutually incompatible. Let us turn to recent events in Australia for a helpful example. In 2017, right-wing senator Pauline Hanson decided to juggle a metaphorical can of petrol while holding a lighted match by suggesting to the media that students with disability, and especially those on the autism spectrum, should be removed from mainstream schools (Norman & Borrello 2017). Claiming to represent the voice of teachers, Ms Hanson argued that these students would be better served in special classes and that their presence in ‘the mainstream’ negatively affects classroom teachers and other children. People with disability, advocates, parents of children with disability and inclusive education experts lined up to condemn Ms Hanson’s comments. Many cited empirical evidence that showed the superior outcomes of inclusive education for students both with and without disability (Graham & de Bruin 2017); Kate de Bruin examines this evidence in Chapter 3 of this book. What they did not do, because

they knew that the nuance would be lost in the throes of ill-informed public debate, was say:

Well yeah, students with disability and especially those on the autism spectrum should *not* be included in ‘the mainstream’. That’s because it was built for most, not *all*, and its very existence depends on the coexistence of a parallel special-education system into which students who do not fit a system that was never designed for them can be directed. The truth is that ‘the mainstream’ is *not* inclusive, and it is no surprise whatsoever that students with disability (and many others) do not thrive there.

Conflating the concept of inclusive education with the concept of the mainstream creates many problems going forward. Most frustrating is the associated claim that ‘inclusion doesn’t work’, and the inside thought of many inclusive experts is:

Well no, if inclusion is interpreted to mean placing students with disability into unreconstructed ‘mainstream’ schools—schools that we know were designed with the ‘average’ student in mind—then of course it doesn’t work. But ‘it’, in this case, isn’t inclusion—‘it’ is integration. We abandoned integration in the 1990s, because we learned all the way back then that ‘it’ doesn’t work.

It is therefore critical that everyone involved with inclusive education uses precise terminology going forward. For much of the last 25 years, inclusive education stakeholders have been grappling with the problem of how to make inclusion happen, when so few key stakeholders understand what it really is. There are several aspects to this problem that have made it difficult to solve. Aspect 1 is an artefact of what Donald Rumsfeld once referred to as ‘unknown unknowns’ (Launer 2010: 628), which is an extension of Bradley’s (1997) concept of unconscious incompetence. In other words, it is easy to believe a school is inclusive when a common definition of inclusive education is lacking and impossible to make that school inclusive if a flawed definition is applied, as this will result in the belief that inclusion has already been achieved. Aspect 2 is the gradual

appropriation of both the concept and language of inclusion by special education (Walton 2015). This appropriation started in the early 2000s as a response to policies that promoted inclusive education, threatening the careers and professional status of all those wedded to the paradigm it sought to replace. This appropriation has fuelled Aspect 1 by muddying the waters and confusing educators, who applied exclusionary practices in the genuine belief that they were being inclusive. Cátia Malaquias—founder of the advocacy organisation known as Starting with Julius, and co-founder of All Means All, the Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education—calls this ‘fauxclusion’. It is an apt term for the rebadging that has so far thwarted the genuine development of inclusive education.

Fauxclusion

Calling suspension centres ‘Inclusion Units’ is just one example of this rebadging in practice. We have our own examples here in Australia. For example, when observing across seven primary schools in Queensland for a longitudinal study investigating disruptive behaviour, I asked the deputy principal of School 5 why there were so many adults in one classroom, and why there seemed to be two classes in the one small room. The deputy looked at me like I was from another planet and then informed me—with an edge to her voice—that their school was an ‘inclusive school’ and that the class I had just been observing was an ‘inclusive class’. Her tone suggested that I had asked a silly question, and she began to walk away, believing it had been answered. But, of course, I was now very interested to know more (like, if this is an inclusive class, then what do the other classes look like?) and persisted with a request for clarification. Looking slightly annoyed, the deputy explained that they had closed their Special Education Program (SEP) because of the Queensland Department of Education’s new inclusion policy. This class was considered an ‘inclusive class’ because it now included the ‘SEP kids’ who were being taught by the ‘SEP teacher’. The other half of the class comprised the ‘mainstream kids’ who were being taught by the ‘mainstream teacher’. The teachers were ‘co-teaching’ this new ‘inclusive class’.