

LOOKING NORTH THROUGH SOUTHERN EYES

SUE DOCKETT

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on the *University of the Arctic Thematic Network: Teacher Education for Diversity and Social Justice*, this volume sets an ambitious agenda: to outline, review, and reflect on policies of equity and inclusion in diverse contexts across the Circumpolar North. The publication reflects the aims of the network, which include a focus on education for equality and social justice, cooperation among members, and the exchange of ideas and information.

Reading through the chapters, it becomes clear that there are both similarities and differences across the contexts described, as well as in the policies developed to support inclusion and equity and their interpretation and implementation. Just as the other chapters offer distinct perspectives, my contribution is framed by a single perspective: one set of southern eyes, intrigued and fascinated by those same similarities and differences within Australian contexts. While wary of oversimplifying comparisons as dualisms, I note some similarities in the positioning of rural and urban contexts in Finland and some parts of Australia, and I reflect on the

notion that in so connected a world, multiple forms of isolation remain. Similarly, the *Closing the Gap* discourse employed in policy frameworks across Alaska and Australia serves to provoke ongoing critique and reflection, as does the legacy of colonialism and assimilationist policies.

Each chapter invites the reader to question what has been taken for granted in their own context, to scrutinise the familiar, and to consider alternative ways of approaching issues of inclusion and equity. My southern eyes immediately identify the familiar while at the same time considering how things could be different. As with many international comparisons, much of the value lies less in exploring efforts to adopt the outlined practices and approaches than in the opportunity to see things through different lenses and to consider alternative ways of knowing and experiencing inclusion and equity. As indicated in several of the chapters, such opportunities also involve acknowledging the impact of exclusion and inequity. Points of commonality and difference create spaces for reflection in exploring questions that include the following.

- What does inclusivity mean—right here, right now?
- How are the rights of individuals extended to all?
- How are issues of equity and inclusion framed as issues of social justice and of human rights?
- What are our expectations for equity?
- What are the barriers to inclusion and to equity?
- Are the same barriers experienced by all?
- How are these barriers overcome or addressed?
- Who contributes to discussion/policy/legislation on inclusion and equity?
- Whose views are accepted or listened to?

The increasingly globalised context of education links readily to international comparisons, whether of student performance on international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2018b), or comparative rankings of the state of education across countries (OECD, 2018a). This book promotes international comparisons. Many of these generate positions and rankings; they also generate considerable angst at national policy level, as every country wants to be considered the best, above average, or at least high in the competition tables. This book is not about that sort of international compar-

ison. Instead, chapter authors pursue an analysis of inclusion and equity—or of approaches to inclusion and equity—reflecting both global influences and a range of specific cultural, social, historical and political contexts. In so doing, these authors examine the legislative frameworks that underpin definitions of inclusion and equity and supporting resources, as well as interpretations of these in policy and practice. Along with positive impacts, the authors also note the limitations and unintended consequences of some policies and how these are linked to exclusion and inequity.

Beyond their reference to contexts within the Circumpolar North, what unites these chapters is their focus on efforts to explore how all citizens in a given context can access their rights and responsibilities within equitable and inclusive societies.

GLOBAL, NATIONAL, AND LOCAL INFLUENCES ON INCLUSION AND EQUITY

Despite substantial observable changes in recent decades framing education systems and provisions in terms of their contribution to global markets, human capital development, and the competitiveness of local economies, education policies 'are still articulated in nationally specific terms' and 'represent a particular configuration of values whose authority is allocated at the intersection of global, national and local processes' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 3). In other words, despite global influences and pressures, education policies reflect the values and priorities of states and/or nations at a particular point in their history.

One of the challenges of comparative policy studies involves recognising both the global discourses that frame policy and the diverse contexts in which policies are developed and implemented. The chapters in this book address this challenge by reflecting on the role and impact of global policy discourses related to inclusion and equity while also exploring specific contexts in which such policies have been developed and implemented.

Several global policy discourses have highlighted issues of inclusion and equity in education; among these, key instruments include the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948); the *Convention against Discrimination in Ed-*

ucation (United Nations, 1960); the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989); and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006).

The *Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) represents a pivotal moment in the international focus on inclusive education. Soon after, the term inclusion appeared in the major policy instruments of international organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD, as well as in national and local policy frameworks. Yet despite this surge of interest in inclusion at the time of the Salamanca statement and subsequently, that international commitment has not generated a common interpretation of the term. While UNESCO's *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (2009) failed to resolve this issue, it did affirm the 1994 position that children with disabilities have the same rights as others to a fair and meaningful education, regardless of context or the particular challenges they face (Slee, 2011).

This reference to children with disabilities is deliberate, as much of the discussion about inclusive education addresses provisions for children with special education needs, although defined within a given context. These include the educational placement of children with special needs, with ongoing debate around the suitability of mainstream and/or special schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment (Lyons & Arthur-Kelly, 2014).

INCLUSION: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

As the chapters of this book make clear, inclusion means different things in different contexts. The UNESCO document *Guidelines for Inclusion: Education for All* (2005) emphasises that inclusion is a process rather than a state to be achieved, with the aim of “responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning” (p. 12). The same document positions inclusive education as part of the international agenda of *Education for All* (UNESCO, 2000), arguing that education is a

facilitator in everyone’s human development and functionality, regardless of barriers of any kind, physical or otherwise ... Inclusion, thus, involves adopting

a broad vision of Education for All by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. (UNESCO, 2005, p. 11)

The Canadian and Alaskan chapters direct attention to the inclusion of indigenous peoples, recognition of aboriginal languages, histories and knowledges, and the importance of reconciliation. Both chapters note the history of exclusion of indigenous peoples and advocate strategies that not only include indigenous peoples and perspectives but also value and respect them. Hirshberg, Ohle, Harvey and Cost outline strategies to achieve this in the Alaskan context through transformation of teacher education programs. In advocating social inclusion, Moore and Anderson note the challenge for Canadians—and, by implication, for all of us—to consider the collective responsibilities we share.

Keskitalo and Olsen highlight the significance of the inclusion of Sami culture and languages in Norwegian education and the contribution this makes to ‘indexes of belonging’. The authors describe the multilingual context of Norwegian education and the role of Sami schools and the Sami curriculum. Given the country’s history of assimilationist approaches, this recognition of Sami culture in the new core national curriculum is heralded as a major advance in promoting inclusion by ensuring that all students can access information about the diverse history, culture, knowledge, and rights of the Sami people. In addition, recognition of the Sami as an indigenous people secures their right to Sami education.

The chapter on approaches to inclusion in Greenland reflects a strong appreciation of linguistic diversity. Discussing the challenges of utilising education policy to promote national unity, identity, and autonomy, Brincker and Lennert describe the consequences as a ‘trade between social cohesion and social equality’. They note that the situation is not unique to Greenland but is found in many post-colonial societies where national identity is promoted through vernacular education but the language of mobility is still that of the colonising power.

The chapters from Finnish, Icelandic and Norwegian contributors focus on children with special educational needs. Finnish authors Miettunen, Lakkala, Turunen, Kyrö-Ämmälä, Kielinen, and Takala describe a context of cooperation among teachers and families in small communities and neighbourhood schools, working

together to promote inclusive education. Noting that most children with special educational needs are catered for in mainstream classrooms, the authors emphasise the importance (and some of the challenges) of local autonomy for teachers in constructing relevant and culturally responsive curricula. However, they also note tensions between approaches in rural and urban areas, as well as conflicts between inclusion and the neoliberal emphasis on preparing the workforce of the future.

As in Norway, both Finland and Iceland regard a new national curriculum as a positive policy instrument for inclusive education. According to Oskarsdottir, Gisladdottir, and Gudjonsdottir, the Icelandic curriculum builds on the earlier policy of teaching pupils rather than subjects and promoting regular (mainstream) school as the appropriate education setting for most children, including many of those with special education needs. In the new curriculum, *democracy and human rights and equality* form two of the six pillars of what is seen as a move away from a deficits-based perspective towards a strengths-based approach, requiring schools to respond to diversity and to provide equal and appropriate education opportunities for all children. Nevertheless, the authors note variations in how inclusive education is defined, understood, and implemented.

As in Finland and Iceland, Maxwell and Bakke report a long standing commitment to inclusive education and social equality in Norway. They describe the principles of an 'adapted education' that offers equal opportunities to all, supplemented by tailored education adapted to the individual child. Effective implementation of adapted education relies on the classroom teacher's special education expertise to provide a mainstream education experience that is relevant and appropriate for each individual. This introduces a range of challenges, not least in terms of the relationships and interactions between adapted education, special education, and expert knowledge. Further challenges include the increasing focus on international competitiveness and the need to ensure that the country's increasingly multicultural population can access the same opportunities as those born in Norway. In this regard, the authors note that

while the Norwegian system has been very effective regarding integration, when the construct is considered as the right to the same, there is still room for improvement regarding inclusion when inclusion is considered to be the right to be different.

Issues of multiculturalism and inclusion also feature in the Russian chapter, which focuses on the Arkhangelsk region. Flotskaya and Bulanova argue that the prevailing atmosphere of tolerance of difference across communities reflects the region's history of migration. However, they also note challenges in providing the necessary infrastructure and support for inclusion of migrants, especially as foreign students arrive in the region. While use of the indigenous Nenets language for educational purposes is supported in the Nenets Autonomous District, the Russian language remains dominant as the language of mobility.

The Swedish authors Bergmark and Alerby emphasise the role of education in promoting a sustainable and inclusive society, noting in particular the role of student participation in achieving this goal. Arguing that student participation creates the conditions for inclusion, in turn supporting diversity and multiple perspectives, the authors also note the challenges that schools face, especially in geographically remote areas of Sweden. The challenges of educational provision for newly-arrived migrants and refugees, as well as multilingualism and high drop-out rates, particularly among young indigenous people, are shared by many other Arctic countries, as in other parts of the world. Granted these challenges and the significant resource implications, inclusive educational contexts nevertheless create a climate in which innovation and new ways of thinking can be tested. Bergmark and Alerby reiterate the importance of democratic values in education, focusing in particular on student participation as a means of creating a sustainable and inclusive society that appreciates its citizens diversity while also building a sense of belonging.

While the commitment to social inclusion is clear, Sweden is one of many countries impacted by globalisation and by education reforms that promote standardisation, competition, and measurable academic outcomes. Spratt and Beaton report differing responses to these global challenges in Scotland and England. Although both countries are part of the United Kingdom, they differ considerably in their approach to inclusion, reflecting different educational histories and institutions. Spratt and Beaton describe the English approach to inclusion as falling between competing educational philosophies. The UNESCO vision of inclusion (1994, 2009) as educating all students inclusively, recognising diversity, and adapting school practice to the individual is contrasted with the OECD (2012) focus on equity

in terms of educational outcomes, in which all students are expected to meet minimum standards that will equip them for future participation in the workforce. As a consequence, educators face the demanding task of balancing support for appropriately inclusive classrooms for all students against the demands of a performance-led school culture.

Recent iterations of the Scottish national curriculum have promoted flexibility, seeking to support changing multicultural communities while protecting traditional culture. While the market-driven approach to education has been less prevalent in Scotland than in England, there is evidence of an emerging emphasis on preparing citizens for the modern workforce, with accompanying concerns that measures of educational success have narrowed to reflect a stronger neoliberal focus.

This overview of contributions on educational inclusion and equity serves as a reminder that these are political issues, nested within multiple political contexts, and that approaches to inclusion and equity are dynamic, as are policy and practice.

POLICY AS PROCESS

Policy can be conceptualised as a process that involves both production and implementation of a policy text. According to Ball (1994, p. 10), 'policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended'. Policy discourses incorporate the specific values, knowledges, and ideas that frame a political position. Education policies often have complex histories, reflecting the involvement of multiple actors and a history of negotiation and compromise. As policies are developed, presented, and received, spaces emerge for interpretation and re-interpretation (Hard, Lee, & Dockett, 2018). This is seen in the emergence, refinement, and reform of policies related to educational inclusion and equity. In some national contexts the Salamanca statement provided opportunities to build on an existing culture of inclusion; in others, it represented a substantial shift in policy direction. Perhaps we should not be surprised that the same policy has been interpreted and re-interpreted in different ways, or that different educational contexts generate different ways of responding to the same policy imperatives. Notwithstanding global influences, frameworks for inclusive education are embedded in the general education framework of each state or country. Despite

some similarities across contexts, the differing evolution of these systems, as well as differences in legislation, regulation, and expectations, all contribute to differing interpretations.

One example of the reinterpretation of inclusive education policy at global level can be found in the UNESCO positions of 1994 and 2009. The *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) emphasised the importance of moving children with special educational needs out of special schools and into the mainstream classroom in order to remove the division between special and mainstream schooling. Building on this approach, the *2009 Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* promote inclusive education as a means of responding to diversity, where inclusion is now characterised as a

process of addressing and responding to the diversity and needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. (UNESCO, 2009, pp. 8–9)

From this perspective, inclusion is not viewed as an end in itself; rather, the focus is on the value of education and the right of all to access education—in effect, shifting the emphasis from inclusion to non-exclusion, not only for children with special educational needs but for any individual or group that might be vulnerable to exclusion.

While there is substantial international agreement on the ideology of inclusion, considerable variation remains in the interpretation of inclusive practices and supporting pedagogical actions. This is evident in the many forms of commitment to inclusion reported here, which are enacted in various ways and present a range of challenges.

INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Issues of equity and social justice are central to inclusion. Drawing on Sen's (1992) capability approach, Unterhalter (2009) outlines three approaches to equity in education: equity from below; equity from above; and equity from the middle.

Equity from below emphasises the agency of individuals and involves expanding capabilities. As Unterhalter describes it, equity from above includes policies and regulations that contribute to the conditions that facilitate other forms of equity. Finally, equity from the middle refers to the use of resources (e.g. ideas, finances, expertise) needed to enact equity. This tripartite approach views equity as interwoven, such that the capabilities of the individual are linked to the professional capabilities of teachers and supported by an organisational architecture that 'contributes to equalising capabilities in education' (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 422).

This approach sits alongside that of the OECD, which identifies two elements of equity: fairness and inclusion. On this definition, fairness entails efforts to ensure that personal and social circumstances do not impede educational success, and inclusion 'means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills' (OECD, 2012, p. 15). Hardy and Woodcock (2015) argued that this latter definition aligns equity with neoliberal ideas, positioning it as complementary to a nation's economic competitiveness. They caution that such positioning may impact on the social inclusion ideals that underpin many national approaches to equity, some of which have been outlined in the chapters of this book.

Social justice is also a core element of inclusive education. Fraser's (2008) definition of social justice invokes the rhetoric of social inclusion, referring to the capacity of individuals to participate as peers in social life. Within Fraser's three-dimensional framework, achieving social justice requires the removal of barriers to participation by directing attention to redistribution, recognition, and representation. In the context of inclusive education, redistribution involves ensuring that all children have access to quality education opportunities and the resources to support their engagement and educational success. Recognition means acknowledging marginalised groups and redressing both historical and current limitations on access to and engagement in quality education. Finally, representation includes the rights of individuals and groups to play an active role in decision making and in shaping inclusive education policy and practice.

In their advocacy of just and equitable societies, each chapter in this volume provokes the reader to reflect on the policy frameworks and interpretations of these that characterise local, state, or national approaches to inclusive education. Several chapters locate these issues within the context of globalisation, highlighting the

ways in which state and national interests are managed, articulated, or balanced against global pressures. While expressions of equity and social justice differ, and authors report challenges as well as achievements, all identify inclusion as a means of creating a fairer and more just society.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

In considering points of commonality and difference across the chapters in this volume, the present aim is to encourage readers to learn more about inclusive education in several countries of the Circumpolar North, and to provide a basis for reflection on what we take for granted in our own contexts.

Comparative policy studies present many challenges, not least in relation to the diverse contexts in which policies are developed and implemented and the ways in which terminology is employed, interpreted, and/or translated. This is not surprising in light of the long histories and differing approaches and evolution of education systems. Differences in legislation and regulation reflect different contexts and the dynamic nature of education, its systems, and reform agendas. Despite these differences and the complex nature of education policy within any given context, the chapters of this book identify several challenges and provoke a number of questions for reflection. The following questions capture the spirit and aims of the *University of the Arctic Thematic Network: Teacher Education for Social Justice and Diversity* in its focus on education for equality and social justice, promotion of cooperation among members, and engagement in the active exchange of ideas and information.

- How are the voices of those participating in inclusive education represented in discussions of policy and practice? Whose voices are heard in such discussions? What are the roles and respective positioning of children, parents, educators, professionals, and policy makers in these discussions?
- In what ways have the social discourses that link disadvantage and difference been questioned? Has there been a shift from deficit- to strengths-based discourses at all levels—in Unterhalter’s words, from below, from above, and from the middle?

- What has been the impact of positioning inclusive education within the human rights framework? Is there a sense that all children have the right to access inclusive education environments? Has the language of entitlement to the rights of citizenship replaced the notion of charitable provision of inclusive contexts?
- In what ways have we critiqued notions of exclusion?
- On the basis that education policies reflect societal values, what strategies are in place to review and reflect upon the contexts in which inclusion (and exclusion) occurs?
- How do we explore the intended and unintended consequences of approaches to inclusion?
- How do we articulate the purposes of inclusion? As communities, is there consensus that inclusion is about respecting the human dignity and well-being of individuals as well as enhancing their knowledge, skills, and competencies?

The chapters in this volume open discussion around these questions within the aims and scope of the network. While progress has been made, further work is clearly needed.

REFERENCES

- Ball, S. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hard, N., Lee, P., & Dockett, S. (2018). Mapping the policy landscape of Australian early childhood education policy through document analysis. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 43(2), 4–13. doi:10.23965/AJEC.43.2.01
- Hardy, I., & Woodcock, S. (2015). Inclusive education policies: Discourses of difference, diversity and deficit. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(2), 141–164. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2014.908965
- Lyons, G. & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2014). UNESCO inclusion policy and the education of school students with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities: Where to now? *Creative Education*, 5, 445–456. doi: 10.4236/ce.2014.57054
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2012). *Equity and quality in education. Supporting disadvantaged students and schools*. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/50293148.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2018a). *Education at a glance*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/>
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2018b). *PISA results in focus*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. London: Routledge.
- Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality re-examined*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slee, R. (2011). *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (1994). *Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education*. Retrieved from <http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/unesco-salamanca.shtml>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2000). *Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232205>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2005). *Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring access to education for all*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140224>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2009). Policy guidelines on inclusion in education. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000177849>

United Nations. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

United Nations. (1960). Convention against discrimination in education. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/DiscriminationInEducation.aspx>

United Nations. (1989). Convention on the rights of the child. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

United Nations (2006). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Unterhalter, E. (2009). What is equity in education? Reflections from the capability approach. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28, 415–424. doi:10.1007/s11217-009-9125-7