

# RESEARCHING ACHIEVEMENT AND INCLUSION TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES OF ALL LEARNERS

## *Investigando la relación entre rendimiento e inclusión para mejorar las experiencias educativas y los resultados de todos los aprendices*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper considers some of the key issues that must be taken into account when conducting research on inclusive education in an era of standards based reform. It challenges the widely held assumption that high levels of educational inclusion are incompatible with high levels of academic achievement in schools and presents the *Framework for Participation*, a research tool developed by the authors, which supports practitioners (and other researchers) who wish to examine the development of inclusive practice in their own schools.

**KEYWORDS:** research on inclusive education, academic achievement, inclusive practice.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo analiza algunas de las cuestiones clave que deben tenerse en cuenta al llevar a cabo investigaciones sobre la educación inclusiva en esta era de la reforma centrada en la calidad. Se desafía la idea generalizada de que niveles altos de inclusión educativa son incompatibles con niveles altos de rendimiento académico en las escuelas y se presenta un Marco de Referencia para la Participación (*Framework for Participation*), una herramienta de investigación desarrollada por los autores, que apoya a los profesionales (y otros investigadores) que deseen examinar el desarrollo de prácticas inclusivas en sus propias escuelas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** investigaciones en educación inclusiva, rendimiento académico, prácticas inclusivas.

## Introduction

**A**S IN MANY COUNTRIES, a central dilemma lies at the heart of publicly funded schooling. To what extent does it provide education for all? In the four countries of the United Kingdom (UK), as in much of the rest of the world, there has been growing pressure on education systems as politicians have increasingly worried about the costs and outcomes of schooling. While governments in different countries have responded in a variety of ways, the major structural reforms of education in these countries stress accountability, choice, achievement and high academic standards as measured by performance on standardised achievement tests. At the same time, there is also a persistent belief among policy makers and practitioners that certain children, particularly those who find learning difficult, have a detrimental effect on the learning of other children. As a result, schools come under pressure to exclude students who find learning more difficult: and those who struggle are often children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children of refugee and immigrant families, travellers, and others identified as having special or additional educational needs. All too often these learners leave school at the earliest opportunity. As a result, the better one does in school, the more schooling he or she receives. The worse one does, the less he or she gets.

While the educational reforms that focus on increasing student achievement have brought the principles of the marketplace to education, the governments of many countries also have enacted policies to promote more inclusive educational systems. Inclusive education has been established as the standard for educational entitlements in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and is a key strategy for meeting the goal of Education for All (EFA) the United Nations commitment to ensuring that the human right to education is fulfilled through the provision of basic education. Basic education is generally defined as the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy considered essential for an individual to participate in civic life. And, although inclusive education is a complex concept that is difficult to define, governments of many countries have been enacting policies to promote more inclusive educational systems based on principles of equity while still stressing accountability, choice, achievement and high academic standards. Developing inclusion and achievement are undoubtedly both worthwhile and important educational aims. However, while this dual focus on including the most vulnerable students and on improving outcomes for all students is a welcome development, it has proved difficult for teachers to know how best to proceed in terms of developing policies and practices that will encourage both highly inclusive and high achieving schools and classrooms.

Nevertheless, some schools are working successfully and creatively within the current climate: managing to be both excellent (as defined by academic standards), as well as being inclusive. Our earlier research on inclusive schools suggested a specific refinement of the factors associated with effective schools: That is, effectiveness in an inclusive school must be more than efficiency or excellence for some children only (Rouse & Florian, 1996). In our analytic framework effectiveness mediates the equity-excellence dilemma by focusing on a detailed examination of how school staff and associated policy and practice support the learning of everybody together (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007). In this paper we consider some of the key issues

that must be taken into account when conducting research on inclusive education in an era of standards based reform, and provide guidance to practitioners and others wishing to develop evidence based practice on inclusive education in the context of high academic standards and accountability.

## Key issues

### *Defining inclusion*

In England, government guidance (DfES, 2001) is based on the assumption that all children shall receive a mainstream education unless such education is incompatible with the 'efficient education of other children' or parents' wishes. In determining this incompatibility, or otherwise, the guidance backed by law (SENDA, 2001), requires that reasonable steps be taken «to prevent [the] child's inclusion being incompatible with the efficient education of others» (p. 4), whilst providing detailed advice about the nature of such steps. At the same time, however, the guidance highlights the value of a re-configured role for special schools as centres of excellence working collaboratively with mainstream education and cites dual placements as a strategy to support inclusion. Thus, government guidance draws on a range of different approaches to inclusive education.

This lack of clarity about the meaning of inclusion, of course, makes recognising its influence in schools problematic, let alone evaluating, researching and developing it. This is the case not only for the government and researchers outside schools but also for teachers in schools, who are expected to put national policies and recommendations into practice. There are, however, two main ideas embedded in the list above, although these too may appear paradoxical. On the one hand, there is a sharp focus on individuals and groups of children who have been identified as being particularly vulnerable to processes of exclusion (those designated as having special educational needs, or likely to experience discrimination, or living in poverty, and so forth). On the other hand, in the final two bullet points, inclusion is presented as being central to the educational experiences of all students.

The distinction, between *some* and *all* children and young people, is important because it parallels government policy and advice on promoting their educational achievement. That is, there is a focus in government educational documents on both individuals/groups who are vulnerable to underachievement in terms of scores on national tests, as well as on 'raising standards' in those tests across whole school cohorts, local authorities and nationally. And, in terms of measuring and monitoring both inclusion and achievement, those test results are often presented as key evidence. However, there is a circularity in this process which may lead to confusion between 'means' and 'ends' that resonates with Goodhart's law which states: when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure. This is discussed below.

### *Inclusion and achievement*

Some have argued that there is a conflict between the government's school improvement and inclusion agendas. The reverse is true. Helping children with SEN to achieve is fundamental to sustaining improvements in schools' performance (DfES, 2004: 49).

This English government statement encapsulates a number of important concerns relating to the central themes of this paper. First, it attempts to bring together the notion of educational inclusion with that of achievement thus raising, whilst trying to dispel, the widely held belief about the incompatibility of these concepts as they are presented by the government. Second, it associates what individual children may achieve with a school's overall performance in national tests. Neither achievement nor inclusion are easily defined, but for the government they both appear to be closely allied to measurable progress in standardised test results. This raises a third concern about the nature of evidence itself. If we are to understand the relationship between educational inclusion and achievement, it is imperative that we pay careful attention to the nature of the problem that we seek to understand, as well as to the data that are collected and used as evidence. That is, it is not about using evidence just because it is available. It is imperative that the complex issues discussed here are addressed if schools are to utilise and make sense of achievement data when developing 'evidence' about inclusion.

### *Special educational needs, inclusion and achievement – a complex relationship*

Definitions and explanations of inclusion and achievement are difficult to untangle. This is because the difficulties children experience in learning are often expressed in terms of low academic achievement and the cause for concern that this gives rise to is often identified as a 'special educational need'. Special educational needs are associated with learning difficulties that require specialist attention. In this way, low academic achievement is often pathologised as a learning difficulty, a problem for the child rather than the school: even when Ofsted (2010) has identified that some pupils are designated as having special educational needs «when they simply need better teaching». It is important to understand this dynamic because as Tomlinson (1982) convincingly showed, 'special needs' are artefacts of mainstream education.

In England, schools are often judged by the percentage of pupils achieving a particular level on examinations (e.g. five passes at A\*-C on the GCSE examinations). Comparing schools in this way may inadvertently reinforce the belief that presence of pupils identified as having special educational needs will affect the results of other pupils. This then may become a justification for the exclusion of pupils with special educational needs from mainstream schools. Clearly the presence of pupils designated as having special educational needs will affect the overall percentages of pupils who achieve pre-specified standard in a particular school, because, in general, pupils with special educational needs do not achieve as well as pupils who do not have this designation. Under these conditions schools have been able to absolve themselves from responsibility for those who experience difficulties in learning and maintain a focus on high achievement for those who do well. This well documented dynamic is one reason why many proponents of inclusion consider the designation of special educational needs and the provision of special education programmes to be a form of discrimination.

At the same time, the 'Education for All' movement gained momentum within the international community. Through this it became apparent that different groups of

children were vulnerable to being marginalised in different countries, and so the concept of inclusive education was broadened to include a focus on reducing the exclusionary forces that contribute to the marginalisation of any learner or group of learner. So, inclusion in education is now concerned with reducing exclusion of any marginalised group, for example Traveller children in some countries, or girls in other countries and so on.

Thus, inclusive education initially was seen as an alternative to 'special education' where special education meant placement in a special school or a form of provision separate or different from that which was provided to other children. As this view gained currency in policy, the term inclusion or inclusive education began to be used by others as a replacement for 'special education' or 'special needs education', usually though not always meaning the education of 'disabled' children, or children with 'special educational needs'. However, as the demands on schools to raise standards increases so do the numbers of children who experience difficulties. There is pressure on schools to consider these difficulties as 'special educational needs', as can be seen in the overrepresentation of marginalised groups identified as having special or additional support needs. Indeed, as Davis and Florian (2004) have argued it is only when the difficulties pupils experience in learning exceed the capacity of schools to respond that pupils are considered to have 'special needs'. We would argue that this relational understanding of the problem explains within country variations in the incidence of special educational needs. For example, in England, this variation is five-fold (Audit Commission, 1992).

In addition, Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) have argued that the focus on special needs leads to a narrow conceptualisation of inclusion. They suggest that the focus should be on the practices that arise when teachers focus on identifying and removing the barriers to participation and learning experienced by pupils. We refer to this as the school improvement view of inclusion and while we agree that the focus is rightly placed on removing barriers to participation and learning, we also acknowledge that it is when pupils experience difficulty that they are considered to have 'special educational need'. In other words, because in practice, barriers to participation and learning are often construed as 'special' or 'additional' needs it is important to acknowledge that the two are not separate representations or constructions of learning difficulty in the working lives of teachers and learners. Moreover, to reject the concept of 'special needs' as pathologising learners does not help to address the structural problems that create these 'needs' in the first place. A more nuanced and relational way of considering how schools can respond to difference is needed.

### *The question of outcomes*

Any investigation of the achievement of pupils will depend on a set of outcome measures against which schools can be held accountable: thus decisions need to be made about what outcomes are important and how they will be assessed. As noted above, schools are often judged by the percentage of pupils achieving a particular score on standardised tests, or in examination results. Often advice from the government is patchy, at times contradictory, and certainly overly reliant on

recommending that schools make use of standardised test data. The importance of evidence is regularly invoked in this era of evidence-based practice but a reliance on using the kinds of comparative data generated by aggregated standard test scores is of limited value to teachers. The presentation of numerical information is of a particular measure at single point in time, often in the form of: last year, this year, next year; our school, other (similar) schools, all schools; this child, these children, other children, all children. As such, it can only offer some insights into questions that consider 'what', rather than *why* this is so and *how* a school might develop inclusion and achievement in the future.

The selection of some outcome measures, rather than others, enables different stories about the effects of inclusion on the education of all pupils to be told. One of our studies (Rouse & Florian, 2006) relied on results from national curriculum tests (SATs) and the English General Certificate of Secondary Education and General National Vocational Qualification (GCSE/GNVQ) examinations as performance indicators. In so doing it excluded those learners who do not take these examinations because they had left school before the examinations, or followed another form of certification. This latter group included some students identified as having special educational needs whose educational targets were below those established by the national curriculum. This was a significant omission in that it is impossible at this time to monitor the progress of that small group of pupils (fewer than 4%) who are not performing at normative levels within each key stage of the national curriculum. There are no easy answers to the question of whether or how the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs in a school affects the performance of others. It is not disputed that the presence of high numbers of pupils with special educational needs will affect the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher grades at GCSE and this in turn will affect a school's position in the 'raw-score' league tables. However, the evidence from our study suggests that, the presence of relatively large numbers of children with special educational needs does not have a negative impact on the achievement of children who do not have this designation. This finding has been reported by others (Dyson *et al.*, 2004; Zumeta, 2009). Indeed, many researchers and teachers now believe that the strategies used by the school for including pupils identified as having special educational needs contribute to improved achievement for all.

## Researching achievement and inclusion

Given the complex and circular relationship between 'educational needs' and school structures discussed above, it is hardly surprising that inclusion and achievement are considered complex concepts characterised by multiple definitions and understandings. Ways of researching the relationship between them that take careful account of the variability in identification of 'educational need' are needed. In acknowledging this complex situation in our research we have focused on the ways in which schools and class teachers accommodate variation among learners whether they have disabilities, learning difficulties, special educational needs or other 'problems' (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007). The case for this approach is justified on the grounds that new forms of empirical work on how diverse groups of

pupils learn together are needed to overcome the limitations of research that is concerned with individual differences between learners (Florian, 2010; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010). Our concept of inclusion is not limited to 'special needs' but extends to the educational needs of other vulnerable, marginalised or previously excluded groups. Our approach to understanding achievement and inclusion draws upon Black-Hawkins' Framework for Participation (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007; Black-Hawkins, 2010).

## The Framework for Participation

In this section we describe the Framework for Participation: the research tool, which supports practitioners (and other researchers) who wish to examine the development of inclusive practice in their schools. The Framework can be used to shape decisions about interviews (who to interview, what to ask), observations (who to see, where, what to record), documentary/archival sources (what to collect) and statistical data (what to use). It allows for the scrutiny of school policies, practices and everyday interactions, and, in doing so, explores the key themes and concerns raised above. The Framework also helps researchers and school staff to consider how these issues interact at different levels within a school: that is, to understand the educational experiences of not only of an individual child or young person but also a particular group of students or a classroom, as well as across a whole school and beyond, taking into account local and national influences and concerns. Thus the Framework is concerned with the participation of all members of a school, including pupils, teachers, support staff and parents/carers. It sets out to understand why one school may more successful than another, often similar school, at supporting both the inclusion and achievement of its members.

### *What is participation?*

This section outlines the conceptualisation of participation on which the Framework is based. We have used this term as a way of bringing together, understanding and re-defining, inclusion and achievement. To this end, the following definition by Booth (2002: 2) offers a useful starting point:

Participation in education involves going beyond access. It implies learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared lessons. It involves active engagement with what is learnt and taught, and having a say in how education is experienced. But participation also involves being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself. I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am.

The principle elements of participation impacts upon all members of a school and all aspects of school life. Participation relates to the experiences of *all* members of a school: staff and parents/carers, as well as pupils. Similarly, participation is also concerned with *all* aspects of the life of a school and not just the teaching and learning which occur in classrooms, although this too is important. It relates to a school's

formal policies and practices as well as the countless everyday interactions that take place amongst its members.

To make sense of participation it is necessary to understand its close relationship to barriers to participation: increasing participation reduces barriers to participation and vice versa. However, these processes are not always easy to identify. Moreover, activities in a school may increase participation for some whilst reinforcing barriers to participation for others. These interconnected and never-ending processes are constantly shifting and may be difficult to change (Ballard, 1995).

Participation is concerned with responses to diversity within a school. These include understandings of, and attitudes towards, ethnicity, gender, disability and ability. Discrimination is often subtle and complex, sometimes unintended, and rarely straightforward; for example, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) demonstrated the interplay between poverty, class, ethnicity and gender in the educational experiences of pupils. This is not to suggest that all pupils receive identical learning experiences but rather that their diversity is recognised and used «as a rich resource to support the learning of all» (Booth *et al.*, 2000: 12).

Participation requires the active and collaborative learning of pupils, in which they make choices about what they learn as well as how they work together to support each other's learning; that is, being «actively involved» (Hopkins & Black-Hawkins, 1997). This is not, therefore, about 'special' provision for 'special' pupils who are considered to have learning difficulties. This understanding of participatory learning can also be extended to include members of staff participating in active and collaborative learning with their colleagues and therefore working towards what Southworth (1994) terms a «learning school». The contribution of all teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as pupils and parents/carers, should be recognised and differences acknowledged, encouraged and welcomed because they provide a range of experiences, understanding and interests that make up the membership of a school.

The Framework for Participation was developed to:

- Examine the participation of all members of a school: pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff and parents/carers.
- Explore the complexities of the educational experiences of individual and groups of children and young people and staff, as well as across whole classes, schools and beyond.
- Address why some schools are more successful than other similar schools at supporting both the inclusion and achievement of pupils and staff.
- Scrutinise a school's policies and practices and everyday interactions so as to reveal the underlying values and beliefs embedded in its cultures.
- Identify existing and potential strategies which are effective in raising achievement and inclusion, as well as those which may reduce barriers to achievement and inclusion.

It is important to note that not only are the five purposes of the Framework closely connected but they can lead to what appears to be contradictory findings. Certain policies or practices may promote greater participation for some members of a school



whilst at the same time reinforce barriers to participation for others. One prevalent example is the practice of withdrawing pupils, with low literacy levels, from mainstream lessons so as to provide small group intensive teaching in reading and writing. Such provision arguably both supports and impedes their participation. On the one hand, improved literacy competence will allow such pupils greater access to the curriculum in the future, on the other hand, withdrawal excludes them from the current learning experiences of their peers in mainstream classes. Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) describe this as the «commonality-difference dilemma» (p. 171). They argue that if staff respond to students' diversity they «ipso facto create different forms of provision for different students and thus become less than fully inclusive». Yet, if staff ignore students' diversity they may exclude them from participation by «offering them experiences from which they [are] alienated» (p. 172). The intention of the Framework is not to smooth away the everyday complexities of schools, but to provide a means by which they can be more clearly understood. In such cases, it is perhaps the values and beliefs underlying the decisions behind policies and practices that require most careful consideration.

### The Framework Structure

The Framework is divided into three main sections, as summarised below. These provide the overall structure by which the principle elements of participation, as discussed above, are considered. Each section relates to an aspect of what it means to participate, or not to participate, fully in the life of a school. The sections are:

- Participation and ACCESS: being there
- Participation and COLLABORATION: learning together
- Participation and DIVERSITY: recognition and acceptance

These sections are supplemented by a series of questions intended to initiate an examination of the processes of participation and barriers to participation:

### ‘Who?’ ‘What?’ and ‘Why?’ of Participation

- Who does and does not participate? And, who decides this?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote participation in the school? What are the policies, practices and interactions that strengthen barriers to participation?
- Why do these processes of participation exist within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school? Why do these barriers to participation exist within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school?

In many ways it is the ‘why’ questions that are most pertinent in understanding participation, for in addressing these, the reasons and purposes underlying ‘who’ and ‘what’ are more easily revealed. However, to make sense of ‘why’ necessitates an exploration of the underlying values and beliefs which shape the cultures and thus the policies and practices and everyday interactions of a school. Such scrutiny can

prove to be a difficult and challenging task, but without doing so, efforts to become more participatory may be superficial.

The next stage of the Framework sub-divides the main sections into a number of related elements, accompanied by a series of questions based on the ones noted above.

### Elements and Questions of the *Framework for Participation*

#### (i) Participation and ACCESS: being there

- *Joining the school.*
- *Staying in the school.*
- *Access to spaces and places.*
- *Access to the curriculum.*
- *Access to extra-curricular activities.*

- Who is given access and by whom? Who is denied access and by whom?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote access? What are the policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to access?
- Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school is greater access afforded to some individuals/groups? And, why is access withheld from some individuals/groups?

#### (ii) Participation and COLLABORATION: learning together

- *Learning alongside other students.*
- *Supporting students to learn together.*
- *Members of staff working together.*
- *Staff and students learning together.*
- *Schools and other institutions working together.*

- Who learns together? Who does not learn together?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote collaboration? What are the policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to collaboration?
- Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school do some individuals/groups learn together? And, why are there barriers to some individuals/groups learning together?

#### (iii) Participation and DIVERSITY: recognition and acceptance

- *Recognition and acceptance of students, by staff.*
- *Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff.*
- *Recognition and acceptance of students, by students.*
- *Recognition and acceptance of staff, by students.*

- Who is recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? Who is not recognised and accepted as a person and by whom?
- What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote recognition and acceptance? What are the policies, practices and interactions that form barriers to recognition and acceptance?

- Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school are some individuals/ groups recognised and accepted? And, why are there barriers to the recognition and acceptance of some individuals/groups?

Of course, in the everyday reality of any school the three main sections, which structure the Framework for Participation, are not experienced by its members as discrete entities. Therefore decisions about where to include specific aspects of participation may, at times, seem arbitrary. Participation and DIVERSITY, in particular, permeates all policies and practices in a school. For example, decisions about ACCESS and admissions are partly based on understandings of and attitudes towards pupil diversity. Similarly, successful COLLABORATIVE learning is, to some extent, dependent upon members acknowledging that the range of experiences and expertise amongst them is a resource that may enrich the learning of pupils and staff, rather than simply a problem to be overcome. Finally, of the three main sections, that of Participation and DIVERSITY, is also the most problematic in terms of identifying processes of and barriers to participation. This is not only to do with its pervasiveness, but also because the values and beliefs which underpin relationships between members of a school are often covert and unquestioned by staff and students alike.

### Using the Framework to research achievement and inclusion

In this section we offer guidance to support practitioners and others who wish to explore the relationship between inclusion and achievement in schools. This includes suggestions about how to make use of evidence that is readily available in schools, using the Framework of Participation. Our aim is to provide practical support for readers who wish to undertake such research in their own schools. Any such enquiry will necessarily vary according to the particular contexts, concerns and interests of different practitioners. However, whatever research is embarked upon, its purpose is to identify strategies and processes which help to raise the achievement and the inclusion of all children and young people, as well as those which contribute to reducing barriers to their achievement and inclusion. Since this is the focus of the research it seems necessary to consider how the concepts of educational achievement and inclusion are understood by those who have a role to play in the research process. Thus the researcher(s) might ask themselves: «What are our beliefs and understandings? How might these views shape our research intentions and interpretation of the findings?». They might also consider the views of staff and students (plus others) who provide research evidence through interviews, observations, the examination of policy documents and so forth, by asking: «What are their beliefs and understandings? How might these views shape the nature of the evidence we gather?». Those who may be affected by the findings of the research should also be considered: «What are their beliefs and understandings? How might these views shape any recommendations, based on the research findings, to develop policies and practices?».

As we have discussed, the concepts of achievement and inclusion, and other associated ideas, are complex and problematic, and are understood differently by different people working in education. Therefore, when researching achievement and inclusion practitioner-researchers cannot presume that their views and understandings

are shared with other members of their school community. The questions above are important because they encourage assumptions to be examined and ambiguities to be revealed across and within different groups in the school. These differences need to be explored, not in an attempt to resolve them, but to recognise that they exist and to consider what their implications might be for any research undertaken. Even two practitioners working together closely on a joint research project are unlikely to share entirely the same conceptual understandings. To support researchers to engage in this process of conceptual exploration in their own schools we have returned to the key questions raised in the first chapter of our book, *Achievement and Inclusion in Schools* (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007). We have selected, adapted and organised this guidance into three areas which practitioners can then use in a range of different ways. For example, the questions under the first three areas could be a basis for:

- reflection by the researcher (substituting ‘you’ for ‘I’) before embarking on research;
- informing a preliminary discussion amongst co-researchers, establishing shared and different understandings;
- an interview or questionnaire schedule, for individuals and/or groups, gathering their own views and also their perceptions of others’ understandings;
- examining school policy documents, scrutinising them in terms of whose achievements and inclusion they support and/or limit, and in what ways.

Furthermore, the findings from such activities more generally can provide two main forms of information by revealing shared and different understandings of the concepts of educational achievements and inclusion and their inter-relationship, as well as by identifying particular strengths and/or limitations in policies and practices relating to achievement and inclusion. Together these provide a foundation on which a more detailed research focus can be established.

Area 1: Examining understandings of achievement in a school

1. What do you understand by educational achievement? (Academic; social; emotional; creative; physical).
2. What do you think different members of this school/class/group etc. understand by educational achievement?
3. Do you think some forms of achievement are more important than others? If so which ones? Why?
4. Do you think different members of this school/class/group etc. value certain forms of achievement more highly than others? If so which forms of achievements? Why?
5. What do you consider to be the relationship between achievement and the following ideas? (Ability; aptitude; attainment; performance; standards; progress).
6. To what extent do you think the achievements of children and young people in this school are influenced by the following factors? (The student him/herself; the classroom [plus role of practitioners], whole school, families and local communities; national concerns).

Area 2: Examining understandings of inclusion in a school

1. What do you understand by educational inclusion?
2. What do you think other members of this school/class/group etc., understand by educational inclusion?
3. Do you think it is more acceptable to include some children and young people rather than others in this school/class/group etc.? If so, who would you include? And, who not? Why?
4. Do you think different members of this school/class/group etc. consider it to be more acceptable to include certain children and young people rather than others? If so, who might they include? And, who not? Why?
5. What do you consider to be the relationship between inclusion and the following ideas? (Exclusion; integration; participation; special educational needs; disability).
6. To what extent do you think the inclusion of children and young people in this school is influenced by the following factors? (The student him/herself; the classroom [plus role of practitioners], whole school, families and local communities; national concerns).

Area 3: Examining understandings of the relationship between achievement and inclusion in a school

1. What changes do you think could be made in this school to raise the achievement of its children and young people? What do you think might be the effects of doing this on the inclusion of ... individual students; identified groups of students; classes; the whole school?
2. What changes do you think could be made in this school to develop the inclusion of its children and young people? What do you think might be the effects of doing this on the achievements of ... some individual students; identified groups of students; classes; the whole school?
3. In what ways do you think assumptions in this school about the 'normal distribution' of ability influence our policy and practice relating to inclusion and achievement?
4. What changes do you think could be made in this school to ensure high levels of achievement as well as high levels of inclusion so that all students can participate fully in education?

*The nature of evidence*

Alongside the three areas noted above it is important for researchers to pay attention to the nature of research evidence they collect. Different research concerns and interests require different types of evidence and therefore researchers have to make choices about what kinds of information they do, and do not, collect. In addition to evidence that is gathered for specific research activities, many schools already have other ongoing arrangements in place for collecting evidence, which are intended to support broader decision-making about school and classroom policies and practices. These are often part of a school's development, or improvement, plan;

for example in England, they may be used to support the inspection of schools by Ofsted.

Considerations about the nature of evidence also concern the unit or level of analysis of the research activity. For instance, practitioners may choose to focus on the achievements and inclusion of an identified group of children and young people or more broadly across the student population; they may also wish to consider staff (teachers and/or support staff) and parents/carers. The research may be set within a single classroom, curriculum area, year group or key stage phase, across a whole school or a number of schools in a local authority. A pragmatic approach is to start by looking at what evidence is currently available: for example, others' research (whether university or practitioner based); government publications, advice and legislation; large-scale national datasets. Particularly relevant for practitioners whose research focuses on developing a greater understanding of students' achievements and inclusion is to consider evidence that has already been collected in their own schools. For example, as we discussed earlier, schools in England maintain records of students' key stage test scores which allow them to compare: individuals, progress across time, progress across year groups, other schools and so forth. Many also collect other forms of quantitative data, such as performance on reading and spelling tests, or measurements based on notions of general ability, such as Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS). They also have detailed documentation about students who have been identified as having special educational needs, such as individual education plans (IEPs), reports from external agencies, etc. However, Swaffield (2003: 39) makes an interesting distinction between schools being rich in data whilst poor in information. That is to argue, just because large amounts of data are easily available does not necessarily make them useful and informative for practitioners. Furthermore, an over-reliance on some of the types of quantitative evidence noted above may restrict the outcomes of practitioner research, because the analysis of such evidence may promote a narrower view of both achievement and inclusion. That is, achievement may be reduced to performance scores in core curriculum subjects, say, thus disregarding achievements relating to other areas of the curriculum and aspects of children's lives. Similarly, inclusion may be restricted to focusing on the perceived learning difficulties of a small number of individual children, rather than looking more broadly at the contexts in which all teaching and learning takes place. Therefore the emphasis must be on gathering evidence which is appropriate to the research focus and useful to the researcher.

## Concluding thoughts

It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this kind of research may not provide its researcher with straightforward suggestions for immediate action to support the development of inclusion and achievement. As we have argued, not only is the relationship between these two concepts far too problematic for simplistic solutions, but also schools and classrooms are shaped by the complex social, emotional, political and cultural worlds in which children and staff live their lives. However, this is not a reason for practitioners to avoid engaging in educational research: rather, we would suggest, it makes the need to do so even more compelling. As Rose and Grosvenor (2001: 5) argue:

Educational research can be concerned with improving our understanding of processes, practices and organisations associated with teaching and learning without requiring a rush to judgement, without needing to provide an answer. Educational researchers have a capacity and a responsibility to develop knowledge. This creative role can involve them in unsettling certainties, in being troublesome, in challenging the 'what works' philosophy and the single-vantage point, single-track mode of education.

Furthermore, Ainscow (2002: 35) notes that, although some might argue that «educational research has a responsibility to provide practitioners with direct answers to the problems they face in their day-to-day work... it is through such assumptions and expectations that possibilities for using research more effectively are masked». That is, it is through the process of being unsettled and challenged, even sometimes troubled, that our own and others' assumptions about teaching and learning, and inclusion and achievement, may be usefully revealed. Thus, the model of research presented here is not intended to provide superficial 'quick fixes', but to develop greater understanding as a prerequisite for bringing about sustainable change.

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