Open File on Inclusive Education

Support Materials for Managers and Administrators

This booklet is based on the UNESCO Open File on Inclusive Education, a comprehensive guide to development in this area.

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UNESCO
Inclusive Education
Section for Combating Exclusion through Education
Division of Basic Education

7, place de Fontenoy 75352 PARIS 07 SP
France

Phone 33-(0)1 45 68 10 00
Fax 33-(0)1 45 68 56 27
E-mail: ie@unesco.org

http://www.unesco.org/education/inclusive

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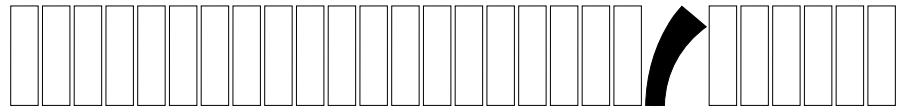
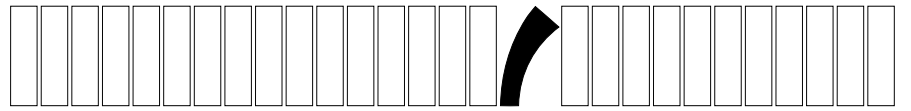


What am I reading?

This booklet is an introduction to inclusive education for policy-makers and managers who have an important role to play in bringing about the change needed to make inclusive education a reality.

School development is now increasingly focussed on the right to Education for All. In describing its vision for Education for All, the Dakar World Education Forum (April 2000) stated clearly that inclusive education is vital if this goal is to be achieved. As a result, more and more countries are working to help their schools become inclusive.

This booklet highlights some of the issues affecting such development and each section ends with a series of key questions for discussion. The booklet is based on the UNESCO Open File on Inclusive Education[1], a comprehensive guide to development in this area.



What is Inclusive Education?

Inclusive education has grown from the belief that education is a basic human right and that it provides the foundation for a more just society. All learners have a right to education, regardless of their individual characteristics or difficulties.

Inclusive education initiatives often have a particular focus on those groups, which, in the past, have been excluded from educational opportunities. These groups include children living in poverty, those from ethnic and linguistic minorities, girls (in some societies), children from remote areas and those with disabilities or other special educational needs. The latter are often the most marginalised, both within education and in society in general.

Traditionally, disabled children and those with other special educational needs have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education and their peers. Some are placed in separate classes or schools; many have been denied access to education of any sort.

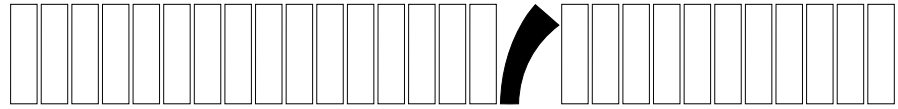
1. Available from: UNESCO

Segregated educational provision separates children from their peers and families and may not be cost-effective. Establishing or extending separate provision does nothing to identify and remove the barriers preventing these children from learning in mainstream schools. Inclusive education is about helping mainstream schools to overcome the barriers so that they can meet the learning needs of all children.

Inclusive education is not only concerned with disabled children, or with finding an alternative to segregated special schooling.

Inclusive education encourages policy-makers and managers to look at the barriers within the education system, how they arise and how they can be removed. These barriers usually include:

- inappropriately-designed curricula
- teachers who are not trained to work with children who have a wide range of needs
- inappropriate media for teaching
- inaccessible buildings.



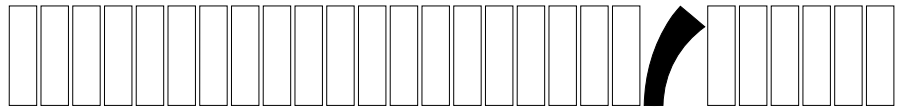
How can inclusive education help to deliver Education for All?

The Education for All (EFA) movement was launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and it aims to give **all** children, young people and adults the right to education. The Jomtien World Education Declaration (article 2.2) sets out the main components of an 'expanded vision' of basic education.

- give all children, young people and adults universal access to education, and promoting equality – by, for instance, ensuring that girls and women and other under-served groups have access to basic education
- focus on learning acquisition and outcome – rather than simply on enrolment
- broaden the means and scope of basic education – partly by ensuring the availability of universal primary education, but also by calling upon families, communities, early childhood care, literacy programmes, non-formal education programmes, libraries, the media and a wide range of other 'delivery systems'
- enhance the environment for learning – by ensuring that learners receive the nutrition, health care and general physical and emotional support they need to benefit from education
- strengthen partnerships – between all sub-sectors and forms of education, government departments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, religious groups, local communities and, above all, families and teachers.

A decade after the Jomtien Declaration, its vision was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum meeting in Dakar, held to review progress in achieving Education for All (World Education Forum, 2000). The Forum highlighted the continuing barriers to education experienced by disadvantaged groups and called for positive action to overcome them[2].

2. Details of conference resolutions can be found in the conference report: World Education Forum 2000

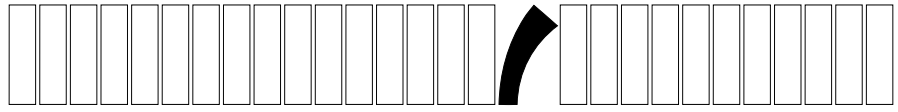


Inclusive Education: who supports it?

The major impetus for inclusive education came from the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. The conference recommendations were based on the principle of inclusion:

'… schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups.'

(UNESCO, 1994, Framework for Action on Special Needs Education)



How do you justify inclusive education?

- There is an *educational* justification: the requirement for inclusive schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching which respond to individual differences and therefore benefit *all* children.
- There is a *social* justification: inclusive schools are able to change attitudes to difference by educating all children together, thereby forming the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society which encourages people to live together in peace.
- There is an *economic* justification: it is likely to be less costly to establish and maintain schools which educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specialising in the education of specific groups of children. Inclusive schools offering an effective education to all of their students are a more *cost-effective* means of delivering Education for All.

1

How can the development of inclusive policies and practices be managed?

The move to more inclusive education does not happen overnight. The change, however gradual, should be based on clearly articulated principles, which address system-wide development. If the barriers to inclusive education are to be reduced, policy-makers and managers need to:

- mobilise opinion
- build consensus
- carry out a situation analysis
- reform legislation
- support local projects.

Education administration systems often need to change to enable inclusive education to develop. For example, uniting the management of special and mainstream education helps to promote inclusive education.

The process of change itself requires financial, human and intellectual resources. A good first step is to identify a pool of resources to support the implementation of legislative change or to pump-prime experimental developments. Building partnerships with stakeholders, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is also crucial.

Questions for action

- ➤ **Is there a clearly articulated set of principles on which the change process can be based?**
- ➤ **Can the development of inclusive education be linked to wider change? If so, how?**
- ➤ **How can opinion be mobilised in favour of inclusive education?**
- ➤ **How could a situation analysis be drawn up, and who should be involved in this process?**
- ➤ **What legislative obstacles are there to the development of inclusive education? How and when does legislation need to be changed?**
- ➤ **What local initiatives are under way and/or could be supported? How could these be 'rolled out' as the basis for further development?**
- ➤ **To what extent do existing administrative structures create barriers to more inclusive education? What restructuring is necessary?**
- ➤ **What resources are available to support the transition process? Who are the key stakeholders and what partnerships could be formed to support change? '**

2 Professional development for inclusive education: what's needed?

The development of a teaching force skilled in inclusive practices is vital to the campaign for inclusive education.

The most urgent need for teacher development is in mainstream schools. Where training resources are scarce and not all teachers can attend training sessions, a 'cascade' model[3] enables training to be disseminated throughout the system. Distance learning is an effective mechanism for giving teachers in remote areas access to training.

If inclusive education is to be sustainable, training must be planned, systematic and long term.

Questions for Action

- **What opportunities do teachers in mainstream schools have to engage in professional development activities? Do they include training in inclusive education? How can opportunities for training in this area be extended?**
- **How do teachers in mainstream schools support each other and work together on problem-solving activities in their own schools?**
- **What school networks and clusters can be established? What about networks bringing together schools and other agencies?**
- **What opportunities do special educators and other specialists have to work directly with mainstream educators on issues around inclusive practice? Can these opportunities be increased?**
- **Is there a coherent pattern of professional development, which encompasses both initial and in-service education and offers teachers training, development and support on an on-going basis?**
- **To what extent do higher education and teacher training provide separate tracks for mainstream and special educators? Can they be merged? How can inclusion be integrated into the training of all mainstream educators?**
- **What opportunities can be provided for academics and teacher trainers to work directly with teachers in inclusive settings as part of their own development?**

3. a small number of trained teachers 'cascade' their skills and knowledge to wider groups

3 What is the role of educational assessment in Quality Education?

In an effective education system, *all* students are continuously assessed on their educational progress in relation to the curriculum. In inclusive education, teachers have to respond to a wide diversity of students, using a range of techniques. Assessment should focus on the characteristics and attainments of the students, as well as on how each student can learn within the curriculum. Assessment techniques should enable students to demonstrate their strengths and their potential and should not unfairly discriminate between groups of students.

Parents and students are key contributors to the assessment process. Parents can provide information on how a student behaves outside the school, describe the student's early childhood development and give teachers feedback on the effectiveness of their work with the student.

If a student's difficulties are more complex, the teacher needs to work with professionals who have specialist skills. This is best achieved when teachers have access to specialists in the school and to multi-disciplinary teams working locally.

Early assessment of a child's difficulties is an important part of the assessment process. Early assessment and intervention minimises the impact of any difficulties, reduces the need for costly programmes of rehabilitation and remediation and makes it more likely that the student's needs can be met in a mainstream environment.

Questions for action

- **What are the existing forms of educational assessment? What assessment tools and techniques are currently available? How can these be developed?**
- **How useful to teachers in mainstream education settings is the information provided by current assessments?**
- **How can assessments help gain a better understanding of the student? How can they best demonstrate the strengths of each student and identify potential for development**
- **How can teachers be helped to develop a wider range of assessment strategies? What are the implications for initial and in-service training?**
- **What forms of in-school and external support do teachers need? E.g. multi-disciplinary assessment teams**
- **What strategies are in place for early assessment and intervention? How effective are these at the different stages of schooling?**
- **How can the involvement of parents and students be encouraged?**

4 How should support be organised in inclusive systems?

An effective support system is essential if schools are to give every learner the opportunity to become a successful student. 'Support' includes everything that enables learners to learn. The most important forms of support are available to every school: children supporting children, teachers supporting teachers, parents becoming partners in the education of their children and communities supporting their local schools. There are also more formal types of support; for example, from teachers with specialist knowledge, resource centres and professionals from other sectors.

A co-ordinated approach to the provision of formal support is critical, with services and agencies working together. This may require changing local management structures to facilitate a 'joined-up' approach to delivering support to schools.

Questions for action

- **What types of support are already available in schools and communities? How can these be organised into school-based support teams?**
- **What support is there outside schools? Do some types of support need to be created from scratch, or can the role of existing support services be extended or re-directed?**
- **How can support be provided in or close to mainstream schools and students' communities? E.g. peripatetic services, resource centres, special schools with outreach programmes.**
- **Do locally managed services meet local needs more effectively?**
- **How should local and/or national support services work with schools and families?**

5

How can families and communities participate in inclusive education?

The involvement of families and local communities is essential in achieving a quality education for all. Families and community groups can take an active role in promoting inclusive education, advancing changes in policy and legislation.

Successful partnerships with families can be developed if both the professionals and families understand and respect each other's roles in those partnerships. Although it can take time to develop, trust between the partners is vital. Encouraging marginalised groups to become involved can be particularly difficult. The importance of family involvement in education can be reinforced by embedding it in the way schools are run and by appropriate legislation.

Partnership with the wider community is a significant opportunity for schools and mutually beneficial; both have resources to share.

Questions for Action

- **How can families and communities support children's education?**
- **How can families share what they know about their children with schools?**
- **What role should families have in making decisions about their children's education? Should this be embodied in legislation? If so, what form should this take?**
- **How can families and community groups have a voice in local and national policy-making processes? Should this be formalised through the creation of legal rights and responsibilities or are less formal strategies more appropriate?**
- **How can the involvement of families and communities from marginalised groups be encouraged and supported?**
- **How can community educational resources be mobilised? How can national and local government support community initiatives?**
- **How can schools operate as a community resource**

6 How can an inclusive curriculum be developed?

Developing a curriculum, which is inclusive of all learners, may involve broadening current definitions of learning. Inclusive curricula are based on a view of learning as something, which takes place when students are actively involved in making sense of their experiences. This emphasises the role of the teacher as facilitator rather than instructor.

The curriculum should be flexible enough to respond to the needs of all students. It should not therefore be *rigidly* prescribed at a national or central level. Inclusive curricula are constructed flexibly to allow not only for *school-level* adaptations and developments, but also for adaptations and modifications to meet the *individual* student's needs and to suit each teacher's style of working. A key issue for policy-makers is how they enable schools to modify the curriculum to meet the needs of individual students and how they can encourage this approach.

More inclusive curricula make considerable demands on teachers. They have to become involved in curriculum development at a local level and to be skilled in curriculum adaptation in their own classrooms. In addition they have to manage a complex range of classroom activities, be skilled in planning the participation of all students and know how to support their students' learning without giving them predetermined answers. They also have to understand how to work outside traditional subject boundaries and in culturally sensitive ways.

Inflexible and content-heavy curricula are usually the major cause of segregation and exclusion. The development of an inclusive curriculum is arguably the most important factor in achieving inclusive education.

Questions for Action

- **What aspects of the current curriculum are likely to lead to exclusion? Is the curriculum flexible enough to allow for appropriate adaptation? Does it alienate certain social and cultural groups? Does it permit progression and accreditation for all students?**
- **What model(s) of learning underpin the curriculum? Do these contribute to inclusive education?**
- **What is the balance between standardisation of the curriculum at national level and the discretion to adapt it at local level?**
- **How should the curriculum be organised? E.g. should it be organised horizontally, focussing on cross-curricular outcomes rather than vertically by subject/content area? What should be the balance between the specification of content and the specification of objectives and outcomes?**
- **What sorts of assessment and accreditation procedures are possible? To what extent can these remain flexible and in the hands of teachers? What accreditation is appropriate for students whose attainment is low? How can a common accreditation framework be established which takes students through statutory schooling on to further education and training?**
- **What steps can be taken to ensure that the curriculum is inclusive of diverse social and cultural groups? How much does diversity need to be acknowledged in the design of the curriculum and how much can be left to local adaptation? In what language(s) is the curriculum to be delivered and what implications will this have for different linguistic groups?**
- **How can schools and teachers be supported in implementing the curriculum? What training is needed and what arrangements can be made to foster local development?**

7

How can financial management assist in supporting inclusive systems?

Funding provision for learners who experience difficulties is always problematic. However well resourced a system may be overall, there is almost always a feeling that resources are inadequate to meet learners' needs.

A number of countries have broadened their approach to funding and resourcing education. They have developed responses to learning difficulties, which are not dependent on additional funding. These responses include: collaborative work by students; parental involvement in the classroom; and teacher problem-solving and mutual support.

Few education systems can provide all the resources they would wish to from state funds alone. It is therefore essential for national and local governments to establish partnerships with potential funding partners. International donors and NGOs are obvious sources of additional resourcing, but so are the business and industry sectors, which have a vested interest in establishing goodwill and helping to produce a well-educated workforce:

In many countries, there are separate funding streams for mainstream and special education. Where this occurs, there are often administrative barriers preventing mainstream schools from accessing the funds they need to support inclusive approaches. Inclusive systems therefore need a mechanism for channelling additional funds into mainstream schools. Further strategies are needed if the aim is to go beyond accommodating a diverse range of students to redressing some of the specific disadvantages experienced by certain groups. Many countries have developed programmes, which promote equality of opportunity by allocating specific funds to areas of social and economic need.

Questions for Action

- ➤ **How can inclusive approaches be promoted without additional resources? How can non-material resources such as skills and attitudes be used?**
- ➤ **What potential funding partners can be identified? How can partnerships be established?**
- ➤ **What are the barriers between the funding systems for mainstream and special education? How can they be brought closer together?**
- ➤ **How can resources be devolved to make them accessible to schools without the need for special procedures and outward referral? What is the appropriate level of devolution?**
- ➤ **How can resources be distributed so that schools and local administrations can meet local needs? Should resources be allocated to communities, schools, individuals, or a mixture of these?**
- ➤ **How far does ongoing revenue funding need to be supplemented by programmes specifically addressing equality? How can these programmes focus on enhancing provision rather than simply distributing additional resources? How can they be linked to wider programmes of social inclusion?**
- ➤ **How will schools and local administrations be accountable for their use of resources?**

8

How can transitions from one phase of education to another be managed?

A good education system ensures a smooth transition between different phases of education. Ideally, all students, regardless of their difficulties or disabilities, should be able to enter the education system as young children, progress through each phase and emerge into a meaningful and useful adult life. This can only happen if barriers at key transition points are identified and removed. Key transition points include: the transition from home to school; the transition between phases or cycles of schooling; and the transition between schooling, lifelong learning and the world of work.

There are clear structural barriers, which make transition within and between different phases of schooling, further, and higher education and employment difficult. These include:

- separate funding, administrative and legislative systems in primary, secondary and tertiary education
- the impact of selection in further and higher education
- the transfer from children's to adult's services
- the impact of selection in the labour market.

If education systems are to become more inclusive, transition has to be managed so that *all* learners progress smoothly from one stage to another, maximising the opportunities available to them.

Questions for Action

- ➤ **How is the transition from home to school facilitated? How are representatives of schools, state agencies, NGOs and others working with young children involved? How are families involved?**
- ➤ **What structural barriers hinder transition from phase to phase and institution to institution? How can these be removed?**
- ➤ **What transfer procedures are needed? E.g. meetings; shared record keeping and assessment; a designated individual to lead transition.**
- ➤ **What structural barriers hinder transition from school to the post-school world? How can these be removed?**
- ➤ **Could any of the following help: widening access; a more vocational curriculum; supported employment and workplace learning?**

9 How can change in schools be initiated and sustained?

The implementation of more inclusive systems of education is possible only if schools themselves are committed to becoming more inclusive. The development of enabling mechanisms such as national policies on inclusion, local support systems and appropriate forms of curriculum and assessment are important in creating the right context for developing inclusive education. However, the involvement of schools in inclusion projects is essential if national policy is to be translated into the realities of practice.

The most common strategy in promoting inclusive education is to initiate an inclusion 'project' in which one or more schools are supported in developing more inclusive practices. Projects can build on schools' own initiatives or can be centrally-run. Special projects alone are unlikely to create a more inclusive education system, but they have an important role to play. All projects work differently, but there are some common success criteria:

- clarity over roles and responsibilities
- effective support for schools
- clear mechanisms for developing practice
- a good dissemination process.

Projects need to help schools change their culture and practice. If the school culture currently takes little account of the principles of participation, collaboration and inclusion, developing more inclusive practices will inevitably challenge existing values, assumptions and practices. This can disrupt the status quo and requires careful management and sensitive support.

Frequently, schools work in isolation or at best with a central project team. Whilst much good work can be done in this way, schools can offer valuable support to each other. Through networking, schools can:

- share experiences and expertise
- develop joint policy and practices
- replace competition and self-interest with a sense of shared investment in the network
- develop shared resources such as specialist expertise and innovative delivery mechanisms
- create economies of scale which enable them to respond more easily to a greater diversity of student need.

Questions for Action

- **What opportunities are there for building on schools' own initiatives to create inclusion projects?**
- **Where projects are initiated outside schools, should they work with more or less effective schools? How should these schools be identified?**
- **What support will be available to participating schools? Try to: offer support long-term; involve families and the community; maintain a focus on the whole school; help teachers to examine their own practice.**
- **What opportunities are there for promoting collaborative projects between schools? Where school networks are established, what incentives and support can be offered to encourage them to move towards greater inclusion?**
- **What opportunities are there for collaboration between special and mainstream schools? How can teachers be supported if they feel threatened by collaborative working?**
- **What opportunities are there to promote educational change? How can these opportunities engage schools and teachers to promote access and entitlement for all learners?**