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### Inclusive research and inclusive education: why connecting them makes sense for teachers' and learners' democratic development of education

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## **Inclusive research and inclusive education: why connecting them makes sense for teachers' and learners' democratic development of education**

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Following pushes from the disability movement(s) and increased interest in children and young people becoming involved in research concerning them, inclusive research is growing within and beyond education establishments. Yet this arena is alive with interesting and largely unanswered questions. This paper discusses some of them: What do inclusive research and inclusive education have in common? Where have the moves towards inclusive (participatory and emancipatory) research happened and why? How viable are the claims to the moral superiority of inclusive research? What kinds and quality of knowledge does inclusive research produce? Finally the question is addressed of what all this means for inclusive education, arguing that inclusive research has under-explored potential to reinvigorate inclusive education and provide new connections to democracy and social justice in education.

**Keywords:** participatory research; emancipatory research; inclusive research; inclusive education; philosophy; student voice

### **Introduction**

#### ***Impetus for the paper***

Two complex movements are building that have promoting social justice at their core: inclusive research, concerned with socially just ways of knowing (Cook, 2012) and inclusive education, concerned with socially just ways of organising teaching and learning (Clough, 2005). Inclusive research acts critically on the relationship between those who research and those who are researched to make the research more collaborative and relevant. Inclusive education acts to bring in learners from the periphery, making everyday education more responsive to all learners. Norwich (2013, p. 2) sees inclusion as representing 'a contemporary mix of the values of equal opportunity, social respect and solidarity' and this fits inclusive research as well as inclusive education. In this paper I look at how the two are connected and the benefits of connecting them further. I recall two significant moments in my own history when inclusive research and inclusive education came together in my thinking:

It is 2001; I am at a conference – Testimonies of Resistance in Learning Disability History – at The Open University where I am working developing distance learning

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materials in inclusive education. The audience, chairs of sessions and presenters each include a mix of academics, practitioners and people with learning disabilities. An academic researcher is presenting her findings about the history of a long-stay institution she has been researching using archive material; she is explaining something about the education going on at the institution and her carefully researched knowledge about this. There is an interjection from the audience from an older woman with learning disabilities<sup>1</sup> who politely but assertively points out that the speaker is wrong. The educational artefacts in the illustrations that the academic is relying on as evidence were, the interjector explains, brought out on special occasions when there were official visitors; they were otherwise never used. This woman lived a good deal of her life in an institution; she speaks from lived experience – her experiential knowledge is challenging the veracity of academic knowledge. The room is hushed as we collectively recognise the significance of the moment and of this kind of event.

A decade has passed and, with a colleague, I am running a seminar series on the concept of access for people with learning disabilities. The challenge of understanding the process of accessing ordinary things in a range of domains, including education, is being explored together by academics, practitioners and people with learning disabilities (I have learned that to attempt the exploration without such collaboration would be foolish). I think we have a shared purpose and collective understanding. One of the participants speaks up along the lines of ‘I just want the bus to stop when I put out my hand’. I am stopped in my tracks. I have been mentally developing a complex multi-layered model of access that will be the outcome of our work together. For this person the desired outcome is more fundamental – this is a cry for action.

Both these occasions were prompts for pause. Both highlight the significance of different ways of knowing. And both, for me as a former teacher of children and adults with learning disabilities now immersed in research on inclusion, raise questions about the nature of research in coming to know, understand, and facilitate inclusive education.

### ***Focus***

This paper pursues a line of thinking: *Where are the primary moves towards inclusive (participatory and emancipatory) research happening and why? How viable are the claims to the moral superiority of inclusive research?* If there is a case to be made then this must apply to researching inclusive education. *What kinds and quality of knowledge does inclusive research produce?* Again, this is important for understanding the potential relevance of inclusive research. To round the circle I ask, *what does all this mean for inclusive education?* First, though, I begin by outlining how inclusive research and inclusive education have been positioned in the literature.

### ***Concepts***

The term inclusive research is not yet widely used. Walmsley (2001) and Walmsley and Johnson (2003), working in the field of learning disability, proposed it as an umbrella term for research ‘in which people with learning difficulties are involved as more than just research subjects or respondents’ (Walmsley, 2001, p. 188). Walmsley perceived a need for a concept that was ‘less cumbersome and more readily explained’ (p. 188) than participatory and emancipatory research and that would allow for the continuity and reciprocity between them. I have extended their overarching use of the term to also embrace partnership and user-led research, child-led research, peer research, community research, activist scholarship, decolonising

research, community-based participatory research, participatory action research and democratic dialogue (Nind, 2014). This acknowledges a whole family of approaches reflecting a turn towards democratisation of the research process, albeit interpreted with different emphases and subtle variations.

For Walmsley and Johnson (2003, p. 16), inclusive research must be relevant to the people concerned; it must matter to them and benefit them, ‘access and represent their views and experiences’, and treat them with respect. When the participatory condition is emphasised it should involve ‘those being researched in the decision-making and conduct of the research, including project planning, research design, data collection and analysis, and/or the distribution and application of research findings’ (Bourke, 2009, p. 458). When the emphasis is on the emancipatory the research becomes part of the ‘struggle for civil rights’ in which ‘disabled people should control, rather than merely participate in, the research process’ (Walmsley, 2001, p. 195). When community involvement is foregrounded the research must involve mutual respect and co-learning (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

Whatever the distinctive element, proponents of inclusive research advocate an alternative orientation seen as superior in some way to traditional research, with greater participation, empowerment, ethicality or claims to truth. Arguments often focus on equalising the power dynamic between researcher and researched including ‘de-privileging ... “researcher-only” expertise’ (Byrne, Canavan, & Millar, 2009, p. 68). Inclusive research is *with*, *by* or sometimes *for* the researched – in contrast to research *on* them. There is a focus on collaboration and respect for different ways of knowing and different knowers with an explicit purpose of social transformation.

While in inclusive research different terms are used across a range of disciplinary and national contexts to describe something similar, in inclusive education the same term is used across a range of disciplinary and national contexts to describe something quite different. Inclusive education is a much more frequently and variously used concept, so much so that its meaning is often lost. Ainscow and Cesar (2006, p. 231) observe:

In some countries, inclusive education is thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners.

Their typology of ways of thinking about inclusion includes: inclusion as concerned with disability and special educational needs; inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions; inclusion as about all groups vulnerable to exclusion; inclusion as the promotion of a school for all; and inclusion as Education for All as per the international movement coordinated by UNESCO. Just as there are multiple movements towards inclusive *research*, so too are there multiple inclusive *education* movements (Clough, 2000). Even without a single inclusive philosophy fully accepted among educationalists, there is a trend of working toward ‘more effective educational responses for all children ... within the context of general educational provision’ (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006, p. 236). In this paper I sometimes refer to disability-oriented inclusive education or to wider inclusive education. Disability-oriented concepts of inclusive education overlap with wider concepts but emerge in opposition to the old special/mainstream divide, have champions with histories in special education (myself included), and focus on disabled learners amongst the diversity of learners that is celebrated.

There are many clear parallels between inclusive research and inclusive education in the literature. Both are conceived either as a continuum of approaches with the unchanged/traditional at one end and inclusive at the other, or as a radical departure from the traditional. In inclusive research Holland, Renold, Ross, and Hillman (2008, p. 4) describe a continuum from simply inviting children and young people as participants, through data collected through ‘child-centred’ methods, to training children and young people as researchers to study their own topics and ultimately giving them control over the research process itself; for Cornwall (2008) the continuum is from (tokenistic) co-option through compliance, consultation, cooperation and co-learning to collective action. While Kiernan (1999) sees a difference in emphasis, Beresford (2002) and Kellett (2005a) see a fundamental difference in kind. Helpfully, Oliver (1997, p. 26) explains that the challenge might be enabling the ‘previously excluded groups to be included in the (research) game as it is’ (as in participatory/action research) or ‘conceptualising and creating a different game, where no one is excluded in the first place’ (as in emancipatory research). This latter different game idea is echoed in descriptions of inclusive education (involving schools in radical reorganisation) that work to separate it conceptually from integration (where children not schools have to change and fit) (e.g. Mittler, 2000). In debates about (disability-oriented) inclusive education, Corbett (1997) argues there is a continuum and considerable messy in-between-ness, Allan (2000) refers to it as never complete, while Thomas and Loxley (2001) argue for a fundamental incompatibility between special education thinking and (disability-oriented) inclusive education. For many, (disability-oriented and wider) inclusive education is about transformation (see e.g. Florian & Linklater, 2010) – of pedagogies, classrooms, schools, and professional outlook – rather than tinkering at the edges. Disability-oriented inclusive education is about active participation – and not just the gesture of being on a mainstream school roll – in the way that for many inclusive researchers it is important to seek active involvement through whole approaches and not just adding what can be seen as tokenistic disabled/child-friendly methods.

Inclusive research and inclusive education share an ideological basis as political concepts based on moral or ethical superiority. Their intuitive ethical appeal as a ‘self-evidently good thing’ (Holland et al., 2008; Norwich, 2013, p. 2) is based on righting the wrongs of traditional, ‘rejecting’ research (e.g. Walmsley, 2004) or of education that segregates and marginalises (e.g. Thomas & Loxley, 2001). They have in common proponents who argue for prescribed criteria to warrant a description as inclusive alongside those who argue that they inevitably need to take different forms in an evolution of practices (see Nind & Vinha, 2014 and discussion in Norwich, 2013). For both, the ethic of breaking down barriers to inclusion is crucial; there is a strong ethical component about this being the right, if not the easiest, thing to do and a sense that the competences of those driven to the margins have been underestimated.

In relation to beneficiaries, in inclusive research there is almost always some marginalised group in whose interests the research is conducted, such as people with diagnoses of schizophrenia (Schneider, 2010), LGBT groups (Browne, Bakshi, & Lim, 2012), or Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012). Walmsley (2004, p. 69) argues that ‘only the excluded need inclusive research’, thus politically active groups of socially excluded people are helping to drive the move towards inclusive research (Frankham, 2009). In disability-oriented inclusive education, disabled learners are the primary beneficiaries, though the argument follows that schools and everyone in

them benefits from their presence and participation (Mittler, 2000); parents for inclusion and other allies are important drivers. In wider inclusive education the beneficiaries might be groups that have been marginalised or previously excluded or at risk of exclusion, or all learners. The potential for parents and teachers to be beneficiaries of inclusive education is rarely discussed in these terms, though research from committed teacher educators (see e.g. Black-Hawkins & Amrhein, 2014; Florian & Linklater, 2010) is helping to transform the dialogic space.

Through playing around with ideas about the connectedness, or otherwise, of inclusive education and inclusive research, some common ground emerges that would be hard to dispute. Both are about inclusion and exclusion, participation and marginalisation. Both assume that those who have been pushed to the margins or assigned minor roles are competent to have, and are worthy of, a more central position. In both, while the benefits may be felt by everyone, the pressure to change is coming from those who are more marginalised and perhaps have most to gain. Both are subject to huge amounts of rhetoric that can make them difficult to challenge.

## Inquiry

### *Where have the moves towards inclusive research happened and why?*

Moves toward inclusive research are especially strongly evident within the fields of childhood and disability studies. The changing model of childhood features a strong argument that children should be studied in and for themselves, which has fostered ‘a shift from a focus on the child as *object of* to a focus on the child as *subject* (and actor) *in* research’ (Mason & Danby, 2011, p. 185, original emphasis). Kellett (2005a) has pushed the argument further, using the conceptualisation of children as active meaning-makers capable of co-constructing knowledge and uniquely knowing, to promote child-led research.

Contemporaneously, shifts from a medical to social model of disability centre on an argument about environmental and social, rather than individual, barriers to participation. This has heightened awareness of disabled people’s marginalised position and pushed the research agenda towards people’s experience of those barriers, thereby challenging them. Disability activists have become committed to empowering themselves individually and collectively including through their involvement in research (Frankham, 2009). In disability studies, as in critical race theory, decolonising and feminist research, the motivation has been in large part a desire to redress wrongs by having people who have suffered at the hands of academic research take control of research agendas and processes.

Academic pushes towards inclusive research have also come from the development of qualitative research and from sociological perspectives. Qualitative research methodologists have highlighted – and problematised – the ethics of hierarchical relationships between researchers and participants. They have stressed the need to give participants greater voice as holders of valid perspectives and insights into their experiences and social worlds. A logical next step has, for some, been using those perspectives (and people) in the design and conduct of the research, to further see the world through the eyes of those whom the research concerns. Sociological perspectives have similarly raised the importance of ‘cooperative experiential enquiry’ (Kiernaon, 1999), i.e. research that addresses the priorities of the group in question and enables their deeper understanding. Theoretically, concepts of praxis and the rise

of social constructionism have supported a stress on marginalised people as active meaning-makers in the co-construction of knowledge.

Beyond academe, globally participatory action research has been influenced by political activists providing an underpinning social justice perspective for research. Methodological moves have also been positioned as political moves (Carr & Kemmis, 2009) and as practical philosophy (Elliott, 2009) concerned with action or social justice (Griffiths, 2009). Grass-roots organisations working in the context of rights movements have been major drivers informing the development of ideas about producing knowledge in more democratic ways. They have helped to create a climate in some circles in which inclusive research is not just about rights, but also ‘right on’ and the ‘right thing to do’ (Holland et al., 2008). In spheres where all the right conditions have come together to support it, inclusive research has emerged as a strong force.

These conditions have been less present in education, perhaps, than they have been in health and social work where user involvement is a key concept, in disability studies where there is a strong move to right wrongs in research, or in childhood studies/children’s geographies where there has been major reconceptualisation. In my own field of learning disabilities the argument that research priorities should not be dictated by others has been fierce (e.g. Aspis, 2000). While research is being conducted by (learning) disabled adults who may have strong feelings about special and inclusive education, their research mostly focuses not on schools but on disabled adults’ lives (Nind & Vinha, 2012). Research conducted and led by children and young people similarly rarely focuses on inclusive education as a topic of interest, in part perhaps because of the breadth and fuzziness of the concept.

Given the common ground between inclusive research and inclusive education one would, though, expect to find inclusive research into inclusive education. Recognising such research is complicated by teachers’ positioning at the troubled boundary of powerful/powerless rather than as a marginalised group becoming empowered. Nonetheless, examples exist. These can be: studies that involve teachers and connect with the drives for their involvement as change agents in participatory action research style projects; studies that attempt to empower teachers as producers of knowledge; studies connected with the movement for pupil/student voice; or studies conceptualised as explicitly aligned with the goal of emancipatory research in not just giving voice but enabling students and teachers to take new and rightful positions in research. I give brief examples of each to illustrate what these various inclusive approaches bring to bear. I end with an example (concerned with wider inclusive education) where inclusive research and inclusive education are powerfully intertwined.

An extensive example of participatory action research with teachers is the UK action research network, ‘Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools’, involving extensive practitioner–academic partnerships working ‘to define and evaluate practices that can help to improve outcomes for marginalised learners’ (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004, p. 126). Here schools selected the foci for attention, and were guided, trained and supported by academics who did much of the data analysis in interaction with ‘group interpretive processes’ (p. 129). The research and mutual dialogue could be integrated into school review and development processes and reflections. Ainscow et al. (2004) characterise their methodology as ‘essentially a social process of learning how to learn from differences’ (p. 131), stimulating ‘self-questioning, creativity and action’ (p. 133). There is, though,



relatively little emphasis on transformation through bringing everyone together in new research roles, and the language of the traditional researcher remains somewhat dominant. The same could be said of an example from New Zealand (Thomson, 2013) exploring resource teachers undertaking new, more inclusive roles in reorganised education, described as qualitative research but with strong parallels with participatory action research.

Focused on empowering as well as involving teachers, Jones, Whitehurst, and Hawley (2012), in their Accessible Research Cycle, sought to support teachers 'to generate and complete research about their own practice; thereby becoming the initiators and owners of the research' (p. 3). Concerned with under-represented voices in educational inquiry, and seeking 'an inclusive lens' (p. 1) they focus on teachers as both users and generators of research evidence. As Kellett (2005b) did in relation to teaching research methods to children, they attempt to codify a process, in this case making the research process for practitioners largely accessible, jargon-free, and closer to practice.

Carrington, Bland, Spooner-Lane, and White (2013, p. 714) provide a student voice model in their description of using a 'Young People as Researchers model' to study students' disengagement from school in Australia and disrupt the usual social production of research. They explicitly discuss the benefits of shifting students from being recipients of other people's knowledge and solutions to sharing their own understanding. The researchers recognise that 'the model's effectiveness to engage and empower students lies not only in the focus of the research but in the processes employed' (p. 716) – that is – the collaboration, mutual respect and shared ownership. The students learned and applied research skills and utilised their own perspectives, and while their involvement in the analysis was curtailed they helped to inform inclusive practice. Messiou (2012, p. 1311) has a similar starting point – 'the belief that children can facilitate the process of identifying aspects within a given context that could hinder or promote inclusion'. She uses participatory methods of data collection and analysis and stresses the 'potential that engaging with children's voices can have in promoting inclusive practices' (p. 1315), highlighting new directions for teachers to consider. Her codified framework for promoting inclusion by combating marginalisation is perhaps less co-produced than a mechanism for co-production for others to use in a collaborative approach to inclusive thinking and problem-solving.

Going further into an alignment with emancipatory research, Rojas, Susinos, and Calvo (2013) position themselves alongside participatory and emancipatory researchers, wanting to share control of the research process, 'listen to and give voice to young persons' (p. 158) thereby placing them 'in a situation of enunciation that has traditionally been denied them' (p. 159). Their inclusive approach to studying social exclusion with young adults uses biographical narrative techniques to foreground experiential knowledge. They conclude that 'undoubtedly, the participation of the young persons has been vital for broadening our understanding of the construction of the processes of social inclusion and exclusion' (p. 169) and that this has been empowering for the young people, but they do not articulate the knowledge generated and any changes to education emerging from it.

Broderick et al. (2012) are more explicit about the emancipatory and transgressive politics informing their research. This is an unusual example from disability-oriented inclusive education. Their collaboration between academics involved in training teachers and recently trained teachers in the US is about maintaining the teachers'

critical reflection while in-service where the inclusive orientation of their training faces continual erosion from special education thinking. Their paper is co-authored by everyone involved in the research – a collaborative inquiry circle who worked together for a year to share their narrative data about dominant narratives of disability, and their resistance or transgression of them to ‘restory’ disability in education (p. 829), and to explore the implications for inclusive teacher education. They are explicit about the limitations in terms of the practising teachers’ time to fully engage in the analysis, which nonetheless went some way to being participatory in nature. These teachers have the critical orientation that engagement in inclusive research can helpfully facilitate. As one teacher reflects:

What is the use of my having a philosophical view without the willingness to roll up my sleeves to effect changes or move barriers that stand in the way? Part and parcel of a being a teacher is recognising that teaching is ethical work.... (p. 837)

In this example a democratic model of knowledge is explicitly held and the ‘sense of collective action and activity’ (p. 837) is exciting; it raises questions of how it might be even more so with student engagement also.

To illustrate my final category in which inclusive research and inclusive education are powerfully intertwined I use one of the papers from an important collection from the Europe-wide ‘INCLUD-ED’ project. Puigvert, Christou, and Holford (2012, p. 513) start from the position that ‘educational research needs to employ methodologies that invite the contributions of all educational agents (i.e. teachers, students, parents, administrators, and policy makers) in order to generate meaningful analyses of social reality and produce usable knowledge’. This is a response to ‘traditional methodologies’, which may disregard or marginalise the views of such agents, and which fail to influence practice. Their solution is Critical Communicative Methodology, which ‘aims to analyse social reality in order to help transform it’ (p. 514). There is no explicit link to participatory, emancipatory or inclusive research here, but it is evident nonetheless in the basis of understanding knowledge as the product of interaction and dialogue and a process of contrasting – and putting into dialogue – academics’ knowledge with participants’ knowledge. In their Freirean- and Habermasian-based approach, both epistemological positions are equal and valid. Egalitarian dialogue is needed, using reason and argument to cross power imbalances and ultimately transform ‘social structures that perpetuate social and educational inequality’ (p. 515). A vision of inclusive education thus reached would be consensual and based in solidarity. Their carefully developed methods (including Communicative Daily Life Stories, Communicative Focus Groups and Communicative Observations) create the conditions for dialectic negotiation, just as the conditions for inclusive education need to, and can be, created. They show how a common goal can be both the process and the product of the dialogue.

### ***How viable are the claims to the moral superiority of inclusive research?***

Interest in the democratisation of research ‘can be seen as part of what some commentators regard as a wider turn to democracy in society’ (Edwards & Alexander, 2011, p. 271), with claims to the need for full inclusion in all aspects of life, including research. Self-advocates have been vociferous in promulgating the message of ‘nothing about us without us’ – including research. Their arguments include moral dimensions such as solidarity with participants: ‘We know what they are talking

about and understand them' and full citizenship: 'we are not following someone else, or being partly included, *which also means partly rejected*, by someone else (Townson et al., 2004, p. 73, original emphasis). This builds on arguments from feminist participatory research seeking 'an egalitarian relation' (Reinharz, 1992, p. 181), but stresses more the democratic imperative for meaningful involvement in research as in policy and service development.

The logic of moral superiority of a more democratic research process is not merely that this is more just, but that this leads to superior outcomes. There is stronger accountability to the people the research is seen to serve (Ross et al., 2005) and, ideally, mutual benefit. This may arise from more relevant questions being asked, studies being more meaningful and successfully engaging under-represented groups, with those newly involved in research acquiring new knowledge and skills, gaining recognition for their contribution and building new alliances (Nind & Vinha, 2012; Staley, 2009). Research participants, it is argued, benefit from active and participatory engagement with the findings and their implications (Van Blerk & Ansell, 2007).

The essence of the case for ethical superiority is that inclusive research approaches are more respectful, caring and socially just (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003; Zeni, 2009). The Durham Community Research Team (2011, p. 6) argue that community-based participatory research is inherently 'more ethically-aware', sensitive to issues of power, rights and responsibilities, and 'more egalitarian and democratic'. For many inclusive researchers sharing power with participants is explicitly an ethical course of action. For others (e.g. Smith, 2012) it is sharing the rewards of research and working towards knowledge that better represents people's lives that make it more ethical. Holland et al. (2008) and Conolly (2008) are unusual in acknowledging that despite the positive ethical framework in which participatory approaches are embedded, ethical action and the critical reflexivity involved do not always readily follow for young people. Kellett (2005a), though, maintains that the child researchers she has trained have had no problems with ethical practice.

The ethical draw for inclusive research is often that it gives voice to people who 'have been silenced historically', as with children and young people, 'in the accounts of sociologists, historians and anthropologists all of whom claim to speak with their voice' (Kellett, 2010, p. 32). It is seen as redressing academic researchers' past 'half-truths or downright lies' (Smith, 2012, pp. x–xi), labelling (Townson et al., 2004), pathologizing (Beresford & Wallcraft, 1997), and colonising (hooks, 1990). This is an ethical drive that is difficult to dispute, even if the concepts of power and voice are often over-simplified as commodities. The challenge from inclusive research, regarding who can speak with authority about the lives of whom, is valid and constructive. As Fielding (2004) has shown in relation to student voice, a sophisticated, nuanced concern with the plurality of voices is needed.

### ***What kinds and quality of knowledge does inclusive research produce?***

In inclusive research what is regarded as legitimate knowledge is challenged or extended (Durham Community Research Team, 2011; Edwards & Alexander, 2011). The research is seen as producing more authentic knowledge (Grover, 2004) because it is more grounded in the experiences and values of those concerned. For Kellett (2005a) this makes the knowledge produced more valid as she views children as

more expert on their own lives. This perspective is strongly held in the learning disability field also.

Another argument is that inclusive research leads to knowledge that is richer through being co-produced or co-interpreted. The International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (ICPHR) (2013, p. 13) see participatory health research as characterised by producing knowledge which is ‘local, collective, co-created, dialogical and diverse’. When academic researchers and the people with whom the research is concerned collaborate the ‘reality’ gaps between them may be bridged (Fergusson, 2012, p. 125). Different truths may be brought into dialogue to enable new lines of vision (Cahill, 2007) and more holistic (Holland et al., 2008) and nuanced perspectives (Kesby, 2000).

The knowledge produced in inclusive research may not just challenge traditional concepts, but empower and emancipate as in Lather’s (1986) catalytic validity. The benefits can be reciprocal in that the researcher’s own subjectivity is progressively challenged and ultimately transformed through collaboration and interaction with participants (Cho & Trent, 2006). By engaging in knowledge production, ‘those who have in the past so often been the mere objects of investigation, themselves become the agents of their own transformation’ (Fielding, 2004, p. 306). The knowledge can enhance their understanding of what prevents and enables their participation, which they may be able to act upon to bring about change.

In philosophical terms, virtue epistemology addresses what it is to be a good knower (Kotzee, 2013). In inclusive research insider knowers (ordinarily participants) are high in an imagined hierarchy of knowers. This is what drives the shift of those with insider knowledge to central rather than peripheral roles in research. When insider knowledge is valued alongside rather than above academic knowledge, the emphasis shifts to co-constructions, representing relational epistemology in which different forms of expert knowing are brought together (as in Puigvert et al., 2012). Some inclusive researchers are so allured by the idea of insider knowledge that they fall into the trap of perceiving ‘ideal knowers and necessary truths’, which, Robertson (2013, p. 300–301) argues, social epistemologists avoid. She advocates as preferable to this epistemic diversity, that is, ‘the inclusion of the voices, experiences, perspectives, questions, interests, and social location of those groups who have been traditionally marginalised in the institutions of knowledge production and dissemination’, which is important as ‘the social location of knowledge producers is relevant to an evaluation of the claims the systems produce’.

Inclusive research is important in terms of epistemic diversity for the way that questions are shaped, testimonies valued and knowledge judged. Inclusive researchers seek to avoid the ‘hermeneutical injustice’ (Fricker, 2007, cited by Robertson, 2013, p. 302) that happens when ‘the marginalised groups in question have not been party to the development of the available frameworks for articulating experience’ (Robertson, 2013, p. 302). Instead, their experiences and perspectives ‘change the conceptual landscape in epistemically fruitful ways’ (p. 302). I would argue that the knowledge produced through inclusive research is more complete, though never fully complete as there are always missing perspectives (Robertson, 2013) and (self-)knowledge is always fallible (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). It is contestable, but multi-dimensional, plausible and inclusive of people’s everyday realities.

Despite attempts to disrupt traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge, inclusive research still operates *within* power/knowledge constellations: ‘knowledge/representation and power/intervention are entailed by each other rather than separate

from each other within an either/or logic' (Biesta, Allan, & Edwards, 2011, p. 232). Knowledge generated through inclusive research is plural and complicated and requires theoretical work. Without theoretical work the trustworthiness of the research rests solely on the testimonial power of the knowledge and not on the ability to create arguments that convince others (see Kotzee's, 2013, discussion of Goldman). This leads to questions of how we might recognise quality in inclusive research, and therefore place trust in it.

It is not simply the case that the criteria for good research apply equally well as necessary and sufficient criteria for evaluating inclusive research. Even if we narrow our perspective to just qualitative research the project to (re)conceptualise what quality means is ongoing (Lather, 1986). But if inclusive research is trying to do more – such as, achieve greater impact in transforming people's lives – then new challenges emerge in terms of recognising 'good' inclusive research. It is not as simple as poor levels of participation equating with poor inclusive research, as such research might be ethical, rigorous and impactful, whereas research with more extensive participation and collaboration may be ethically risky, theoretically under-developed and less impactful. Thus, in inclusive research, the quality of the participation and the quality of the research can sit in a kind of tension (Nind, 2014). The Center for Collaborative Research for an Equitable California considers this conundrum as part of developing a code of ethics for collaborative research. They ask: 'How should the epistemic standing of research partners and participants be respected while also meeting established research norms that warrant findings?' (CCREC, n.d.). Similarly, Edwards and Alexander (2011, p. 272) recognise the tension when they argue that rather than community involvement in research automatically leading to better data, "trade-offs" between research quality and empowerment' may be involved.

My understanding of quality in inclusive research has evolved following an iterative process of dialogue with inclusive researchers in the field of learning disabilities (Nind & Vinha, 2012, 2014). Focus groups were designed to facilitate dialogue as 'deliberative, dialogic and democratic practice' (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 887) to generate epistemically diverse knowledge of this complex phenomenon. We were exploring what makes a piece of research good for people judging it for its research *and* for its inclusive qualities – to identify when good social science and good inclusive research come together. From this process quality emerges as occurring when the research: (i) answers questions we could not otherwise answer, but that are important; (ii) reaches participants, communities and knowledge, in ways that we could not otherwise access; (iii) involves using and reflecting on the insider, cultural knowledge of people with learning disabilities; (iv) is authentic (recognised by the people involved); and (v) makes [positive] impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities (Nind & Vinha, 2012, pp. 43–44).

This understanding of quality in inclusive research does not prescribe a set of methodological practices for an immature field where we are still very much learning methodological and relational rules of engagement that are productive. It does, however, provide a tangible vision of a way of doing research that has some credence and for which the relevance to researching inclusive education can be explored. It brings an emphasis not just to the vital process of dialogue but to the products of the dialogue and research.

## Towards a conclusion

### *What does all this mean for inclusive education?*

‘Understanding why the results of scholarly inquiry can be worthy of trust means that students need to know more than is commonly the case about how knowledge is created’ (Robertson, 2013, p. 306). This argument about citizenry, democracy and education applies equally well to teachers, and, crucially, is highly pertinent to inclusive education. Why should the educational community not expect to have shaped research questions, methodologies and indeed findings if they are to trust them? Inclusive education is troubled (Allan & Slee, 2008), the concept is consumed by contestation and arguments about ideology versus evidence are rife (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). The much described journey of/towards inclusive education may have lost its way somewhat, but what if there were a significant body of knowledge about inclusive education generated through inclusive research? If this were quality inclusive research as I have defined it then this could do much to secure the trust of the educational community, who after all would be invested in, party to and co-producers of that knowledge. In these circumstances could inclusive research help inclusive education to find its way?

In some respects I am being fanciful here. I am playing with an idea and I know that I am in danger of glorifying inclusive research when I have largely argued that, despite its ethical and moral allure, ‘we need to come to know it critically’ (Nind, 2014, p. 84). I am not naive to the complexities and constraints that Fielding (2004) so eloquently describes, nor to the idea that inclusive education research will always be experienced ‘as a struggle’ (Allan & Slee, 2008, p. 95). Presenting these ideas in a recent seminar led one retired headteacher to note that she and her staff would have to respond in terms of: ‘but where is the time in schools for this involvement?’ Nonetheless, I am convinced that there is common ground between inclusive education (both in the disability-oriented and wider sense) and inclusive research and a connectedness that make it nonsensical that the two do not come together more often. It makes sense (for my research agenda as much as for others) that we should be doing research inclusively (and consciously and reflexively), to study and further inclusive education.

Seeking ‘a school that democratises’ (Touraine, 2000, p. 283, cited by Slee, 2001, p. 385) is so in keeping with seeking research that democratises that the latter must have relevance for the former, especially as both projects are about how we treat difference and how we value knowledge and knowers. Touraine’s (2000) question, which Slee (2001) argues should be the organising principle for inclusive education, is ‘*Can we live together?*’ I think there is value in shifting this question to, ‘*Can we learn together?*’ or ‘*Can we know together?*’ The former puts pedagogy at the centre of inclusive education, where it rightly belongs and the latter positions the task of gaining, generating and sharing knowledge as a collaborative endeavour. These questions work, not just as potential organising principles for inclusive education, but for inclusive research also. By aiming for the kind of mutuality and ‘radical collegiality’ Fielding (2004) describes, what it means to be a teacher, student *and researcher* is transformed.

In inclusive research about inclusive education the problems, questions and answers would be recognisable to the teachers and learners involved – authentic for the educational community. As Ballard (2013, p. 762) argues:

Ideas derive their power from the values and belief systems within which they are embedded.... This means that to change ideas requires that we also change values and beliefs. This is a serious project requiring intensive examination of cultural meanings, of social attitudes, and of whose interests are served by present systems of power and influence.

Investing in inclusive research would help to foster belief in learning and knowing together – in co-production. By democratising the process of knowledge generation and engaging in rigorous analysis of the social processes of research and research relations, teachers and learners would be more likely to undergo what Ballard (2013, p. 762) sees as the necessary ‘profound change in how we think about the world and our place in it’. Challenging exclusion from research is conducive to challenging exclusion from education, but perhaps less threatening for those in the educational community to begin their thinking with. It could highlight the harms of oppression, the powers of collaborative problem-solving, and the potential for transformation. Ballard (2013), like Biesta et al. (2011), is positive about the practical value of theorising and serious intellectual work, of credible data and critical thinking for transformation. I am simply taking this a step further by arguing that inclusive research offers a mechanism for engaging teachers and learners in such thinking work and in generating and analysing the data themselves. Instead of crying out ‘where is the evidence?’ in relation to inclusive education, which removes the power and responsibility of the educational community, the focus of those involved would turn to their own processes and products of knowing.

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### Note

1. The woman is Mabel Cooper, who has left an impressive legacy in the form of her life story and influential work (<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/apr/04/mabel-cooper-obituary>)

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