

5 Inclusive research, in-/exclusion, and ethics

After the spatial turn(s)

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Introduction

In this chapter, I adopt the stance that space merits exploration in thinking about inclusive (participatory) research and inclusive education and their ethical dimensions. In discussions of inclusive research, frequently conceptualized as participatory research, the ethical dimension is often foregrounded. The decision to conduct research *with* (as opposed to *on*) the people the research is about almost always has an ethical dimension and reflects the idea that this is *the right thing to do* (Holland et al., 2008). Inclusive researchers place strong value on the ethical principles of beneficence—attending to well-being and the doing of good, and of justice—fair distribution of the benefits of research (cf. Williams, 2021). It is less common for them to consider in any explicit way the spatial implications of inclusive research, or to use the term preferred by Nind and Vinha (2014), of doing research inclusively.

In discussions of inclusion and exclusion in education, attention often becomes focused on place and the in/out binary. Efforts have been made to progress the debate from a focus on whether the child or young person is inside/outside the ordinary school or classroom to focus on the quality of their participation and learning experience (Florian & Beaton, 2018). This is a recognition that inclusion is about the nature of the educational space. Space is socially produced, dynamic (Lupton, 2009), performing the power relations and identities of those who occupy, appropriate, and construct it (Gregson & Rose, 2000). As Hemingway and Armstrong (2012) explain, using the work of Massey (1994), spaces are the product of social relations and material social practices such that education (as all of society) is constructed spatially. They note that “‘space’ and ‘place’ are used as metaphors for understandings and practices relating to belonging and not belonging, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 480). Thus, as Gulson and Symes (2007) argue, while education as spatial practice is underexplored conceptually, the whole language of educational inclusion is spatial: in, out, margin, heart, and so on. I use spatial metaphors as well as spatial concepts in the chapter, as I examine both school and research practices.

This chapter examines the ways in which researchers enter schools and classrooms and engage with their spatial-temporal dimensions, implicitly or explicitly protecting, reinforcing, or disrupting the power those schools and classrooms exercise through surveillance and governance (Cobb et al., 2005). This builds on the Foucauldian idea that power is exercised through manifold and often subtle ways in the regulatory regime of the school/classroom that serves to privilege normative behavior. I explore the implications of researchers' engagement with children/young people (and their teachers) as they negotiate ways of researching together for understanding in-/exclusion. Using examples from my own and others' research, I examine how the spatial dynamic can be changed by adopting an insider or alongsider stance, altering the perspective and bringing different ways of knowing closer together and into dialogue.

Space and inclusion in education

In some discourses, schools and classrooms are containers in which children and young people are placed to learn. Here, the in-/exclusion dimension is about whether children are placed in the same containers and expected to learn together (or at the very least alongside each other), or in separate containers where they are deemed to learn more effectively. There may be some attention to the architecture of those containers—the layouts of classrooms—but the spatial understanding is relatively unsophisticated. The emphasis is more on place as a physical entity than on space as the social use of place. After the spatial turn (Gulson & Symes, 2007), or turns, space has become understood as the interplay of objects, structures, and actions, and spatial arrangements understood as socially produced in relation to physical entities (Löw, 2001). The school and classroom containers become concrete representations of social relations (Soja, 1996). Once we conceptualize space as a hybrid or synthesis of physical and social space, space is critical in the in-/exclusion of learners and places are no longer innocent or asocial.

Separate schools for some children, away from their families and local communities, have become less acceptable against the ethical landscape, in which the damage caused by segregation has been recognized (Rieser & Mason, 1990; Tomlinson, 2017). To avoid this, some special and mainstream schools in the UK were co-located to ease and encourage the crossing of borders by students between school types (Griffiths, 2015). While disabled learners have had greater access to mainstream spaces, their exclusion may have merely changed in scope. Rather than experiencing physical exclusion from the setting, they experience micro exclusions within the fabric of the school as liminal spaces are constructed and often labeled as therapeutic (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Buchner, 2017; Köpfer et al., 2020). Inclusion as an ethical and spatial project has become more nuanced as the concept of spatial justice (Dunne et al., 2018) has been invoked. Moreover, the affective dimension of school spaces has been illustrated by those, such as Youdell and Armstrong (2011) and Wolfe (2017), taking a new materialist approach and highlighting how

spaces are experienced and felt in interaction with “questions of boundary connectivity, interiority, and exteriority” (Wolfe, 2017, p. 65).

Researchers have illuminated the importance of space for in-/exclusion. For example, in their analysis of everyday life in schools, Holland et al. (2007, p. 221) argue that space “is not merely a backdrop to activities that take place, it also shapes processes and activities, and spatial relations are simultaneously temporal”. Through her research in Italian secondary schools, D’Alessio (2012) has drawn attention to how school spaces produce insiders and outsiders, sometimes in barely detectable spatializing practices in which “invisible walls” (p. 526) are built between disabled and nondisabled students, used to control and regulate diversity. In this way, physical and social space work together to naturalize school hierarchies and perpetuate the interests of the dominant groups. In my own work, in ethnographic case studies of young children moving between different kinds of early childhood special and inclusive settings with their distinct spatial practices (Nind et al., 2010, 2011), we saw how occupying each space led to different social constructions of the children, offering different potentials for what they could do and be.

As colleagues and I have argued elsewhere, “For teachers and other adults in schools, the production and appropriation of space is a habitual, reciprocal process, influencing and producing physical space while simultaneously being influenced by prefigured space” (Nind et al., 2022). Spaces are never innocent, and they and the people in them are enacting multiple agendas. Children and young people have their own agency, constructing and working within and against prefigured spaces. They also have a strong sense of whether they belong in particular school spaces and of their purpose and status within them (Cresswell, 1996). While “subject positions” may be “prescribed and proscribed” and “differentially available” (Benjamin et al., 2003, p. 549) to children in different spaces, children are “actively negotiating their positions, moment-by-moment” (Nind et al., 2010, p. 667). They work at being accepted and at constructing their identities for particular spaces (Saraví et al., 2020), not least because experience of space is felt on a physical level (Hackett et al., 2018), and belonging is a fundamental human desire (Antonsich, 2010). While I use spatial metaphors in the chapter and sometimes treat space as a representation of power, it is also useful to see space as tangible and dynamic and as “lived” (Lefebvre, 1991). In this way, school and research sites are “not passive, but places of embodied and emotive assemblage” (Wolfe, 2017, p. 66). This follows the idea that “Space is defined by (shifting) boundaries and exclusions” and that “Place, as a space, is a fluxing assemblage of affective matter and force” (Wolfe, 2017, p. 67).

Space and inclusion in research

In much research, teachers and learners are the objects of research, and their role in the research is clearly defined: they are providers of (or vehicles to) data. In this respect, the worlds of the researcher and researched are separate,

they occupy distinct spaces. This separation becomes less distinct in many research approaches, however, with qualitative researchers seeking “to ‘ground’ studies in the experience and views of respondents” (Kiernan, 1999, p. 43), which, if not quite walking in their shoes, implies getting close to where they walk. Ethnographers, particularly those doing “at home” ethnography (Alvesson, 2009), work as insiders, spending time inside the cultural worlds of participants sharing at least some of their experiences (Frank, 2012). In participatory action research, academics and grassroots activists share an entangled space of research and action (Griffiths, 2009).

In education, the space one occupies connects with the stigma or sense of belonging one has, the resources that come with that space, and the power it is possible to wield. These dimensions, particularly of rightful belonging and power over knowledge, have underpinned interest in participatory and emancipatory research as part of a wider democratization of research. The term “inclusive research” has been used to encompass a range of such approaches (Nind, 2014; Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). In inclusive research, the aim is do more than observe the ethical principles of doing no harm and supporting the autonomous decision-making of participants; the ethical principles of beneficence and justice are foremost. This means not just documenting or mapping the “exclusionary landscape”, but doing something to change it (Kitchin & Hubbard, 1999, p. 195, as cited in van Blerk & Ansell, 2007, p. 314). It means recognizing children’s right to make choices, express opinions, be heard, and be treated fairly (Taylor & Smith, 2009, as cited in Green, 2015). Children’s involvement as active researchers reflects these ethical concerns with their right to “participate in matters of relevance to them” (Barratt Hacking et al., 2013, p. 438, as cited in Green, 2015, p. 208). This is a matter of appreciating the standpoint of children who are marginalized in the power relations of schooling. As Thomson and Gunter (2007, p. 329) argue, “Students-as-researchers are not pure in voice, but bring to their projects their experiences, their beliefs, and their emotions, and these shape and frame what knowledge can be produced in their research”.

Inclusive research takes researchers into risky spaces, as the rules of engagement are not fixed. This might explain why there is a clamoring to set a gold standard of what makes research “truly” participatory or inclusive (cf. Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Nind & Vinha, 2014). Academic researchers experience a loss of control in research spaces where the process of decision-making is opened up (Green, 2015), although they often retain the option to close it down again (Thomson, 2007). Armstrong and Collis (2014), while operating as activist and practical policy researchers, depicted strong connections between research roles and spaces when they distinguished three types of space. From an academic researcher perspective, this would be: (i) “My space”, in which academics involve “users”, inviting nonacademic collaborators into the university to research with them; (ii) “Your space”, in which activists involve academics, inviting them into their domain to collaborate with them; and (iii) “New space” that people create for working together. The new space is in

neither's physical territory to help facilitate a coming together to work in new ways unfamiliar to all. New spaces are, in theory, not prefigured by those inside or outside the academy. They offer "different ways of seeing" (Cook, 2012, p. 16) or a "third space of understanding" (Hall, 2014, p. 384) (see Seale et al., 2015, for a fuller discussion).

Mostly, inclusive research is regarded as an ethical project that is about ownership, power, control, rights, adding value, and producing better knowledge (Nind, 2014). I argue that spatial theory is helpful in thinking about and doing research inclusively because research spaces are tied up with social (in) justice (Lefebvre, 1991). Holland et al. (2007, p. 223) use "the concept of 'spatial praxis' to refer to action and practice that can be habitual, as well as reflective and creative". Moreover, the idea that "there is no a-spatial or a-political space" (Dunne et al., 2018, p. 23) applies to research as much as it does to education.

Next, I will address four key questions that arise in looking at inclusive research and ethics as spatial: *What is inclusive research creating space for? What space do I rightfully occupy? How do I appropriate and enter new spaces? What spaces can we create together with new affordances and new rules of engagement?* In weaving my way through these interrelated questions, I draw on a mix of space theories, like a bricoleur using various spatial ideas available to me following the spatial turns and mixing them with ideas about inclusive research to create something new and inevitably unfinished and untidy.

What is inclusive research creating space for?

Much of the literature on participatory research with children and young people focuses on creating age or culturally appropriate spaces (or spatial practices) in which to listen to and with them (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015; Dalli & Te One, 2012), and in which to recognize "children as collaborators in building understandings about interaction where adult and child spaces meet" (Cook & Hess, 2007, p. 30). This may manifest as fun spaces for children to express themselves, engage with ideas, conduct research (Cook & Hess, 2007; Kellett et al., 2010), and even make impact (Messiou, 2012; van Blerk & Ansell, 2007). Often in these types of constructions of inclusive research, the "my space" of the academic is made more playful as children and young people are allowed into research roles, or as researchers enter school classrooms. Participatory research with children is making space for hearing new voices and for seeing the research phenomenon from children's perspectives. Keeping it playful, though, may retain children's "subordinate positioning", where they are still acting according to school norms (Barratt Hacking et al., 2013). Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) present a critique of the idea of special, child-friendly research and maintain that in participatory research, children remain regulated. I am not arguing that inclusive/participatory research can make major changes in power relations in the face of institutional persistence; more that some of prefiguring of power structures and roles may

shift enough to open up cracks for knowledge production that is different from what it would have been without this.

While research does not have to be either serious or fun, the discourse of inclusive research with people with learning/intellectual disabilities is often quite different from that of participatory research with children, the former alluding to the serious business of people taking up their rightful place (a spatial concept) as producers of knowledge (Bigby et al., 2014). Here, the space is more heavily loaded with explicit values about the mantra of “nothing about us with us” and with issues of power writ large (Nind & Vinha, 2014). In this context, the new approach to research is making space not just for new voices, but for political action. Nonetheless, there are dangers associated with self-advocates seeking to enter academic spaces in that doing so might entail them mimicking academic research (Bigby et al., 2014, discussed by Williams, 2021) rather than creating research that is meaningful in other ways. The same could be said for child researchers.

Often inclusive researchers stress the opening up of spaces of choice—about how to be involved in the research and how to conduct it (cf. Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Inclusive research creates options for what people who are usually subjects/objects of research can do in the research space. In working with girls with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties who had been excluded from mainstream schools, we offered them a choice of options for utilizing digital technologies in finding ways for them to express themselves in the research (Nind et al., 2012). As they played with the options and their affordances for becoming engaged and for self-presentation, the girls endorsed “the importance of material space to concepts of belonging and identity” (Christensen et al., 2000, p. 153) in what they said, and they endorsed the importance of participatory methods space in how they communicated that message.

What space do I rightfully occupy?

Researchers of in-/exclusion often need to negotiate access to school spaces, which may mean having to negotiate their way past adult and sometimes child (Holt, 2004) gatekeepers. A key question is who is eligible to be where and do what (Williams, 2021). One of the affordances of inclusive research is the access to people, places, and knowledge that it facilitates (Nind & Vinha, 2014). Participatory photography and associated methods give researchers insight into spaces of in-/exclusion from the child’s perspective, spaces that adults may be ineligible to enter. For example, Pascal and Bertram (2021, p. 21) advocate “listening to, and capturing, the experiences and perspectives of young children on the pandemic” as “congruent with our sense of an inclusive, democratic society which values solidarity and the right to be heard”. Yet they reflect on the need to protect the integrity of children’s storytelling (as their own spaces) and the unwillingness of researchers and practitioners to intrude, citing the example of one nursery group’s “death game”, in which the

children re-enact COVID-19 illness and death away from adults as “private sharing experience”.

When researching in-/exclusion, researchers seeking to understand children’s learning spaces need to approach them “carefully and respectfully” and, as part of a democratic process, to respond to children’s initiatives rather than impose on them (Mackey, 2012, p. 477, cited by Green, 2015, p. 222). The drive for participatory methods with children has incorporated methods in which children retain control of their spaces. This includes providing “child-led special place tours” (Green, 2013, p. 13), joining in “walking interviews” around their schools (Green, 2013), or taking photographs of aspects of school life that they associate with “friendships, relationships and wellbeing” (Allan & Jorgerson, 2021, p. 332), illustrating “what it is to be ‘included’ or ‘excluded’” (Dunne et al., 2018, p. 22). Shifting from their traditional positions as the object of others’ gaze to being behind the camera, enables child researchers, quite literally, a different point of view (Parsons et al., 2021). Involving children in asking “Whose space is this?” and “Who rightfully occupies this space?” is important because of the ways in which physical spaces interact with social capital, as Mazumdar et al. (2017) and Allan and Jorgerson (2021) argue in relation to in-/exclusion.

An alternative to researchers seeking to getting inside—or to recruiting insiders to—children’s spaces and perspectives, is to occupy an *alongsider* role. Carroll (2009) proposed the concept of “*alongsiders*” in the context of video-ethnography and video-reflexivity in research. It reflects her feminist research concern with being an agent of change and wanting to support the active participation of research participants. Her vehicle for this is “feeling alongside” and “looking alongside” (rather than at or through) participants. This would involve children and researchers aligning and sharing purpose as researchers stand alongside children (and teachers) in solidarity. Being alongside offers a different perspective. This is not the same as giving children (measured) access to the research spaces, dialogues, and decisions that are usually closed to them (Thomson & Gunter, 2007), or the reciprocity usually associated with the democratization of research, but it again illustrates that inclusive research (however it is realized, and however imperfect) has a spatial dimension.

How do I appropriate and enter new spaces?

Inclusive research is not always about collaborating nicely together in each other’s spaces. Sometimes access to the research space is claimed rather than given (Thomson, 2007). Duncan (1996, p. 129, as cited in Holland et al., 2007, p. 224) conceptualizes space as “subject to various territorializing and deterritorializing processes whereby local control is fixed, claimed, challenged, forfeited and privatized”. Holland et al. (2007, p. 225) saw school staffrooms as places where “students are kept at bay, spatially, physically and aurally”. A research equivalent might be academic researchers, having collaborated in

the field, returning to their university offices to do data analysis in their private space (Nind, 2011). In schools, “Struggles about movement, time, voice and space abound, leeway is gained, small victories are won by students and contests erupt” (Holland et al., 2007, p. 227). Similarly, research is a site of contestation in which power relations are materially enacted. I recall that when we invited people with learning (intellectual) disabilities into our university to work with us within our carefully crafted rules of engagement, they wandered off to move around the buildings and campus, breaking free of constraints to explore the unfamiliar terrain (Nind & Seale, 2009). In this instance, “more direct modes of experience” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7), sensory modes, were being used to comprehend this place of research and to appreciate the “taste and feel of inclusive research” (Trell & van Hoven, 2010, p. 91). As in walking interviews, the young people were interested in “physical experiences of place” (Trell & van Hoven, 2010, p. 95) taking the initiative to move our inclusive research in a new direction.

While various marginalized groups may not be waiting to be invited into inclusive research spaces, it is rare for children and young people to gate-crash their way into research. They are invited and trained as researchers, which may mean that the power within the research is disrupted only superficially. This makes it questionable as to what extent the research belongs to them and to what extent they belong in the research space. Inclusive research may be a new space, but it is one that is heavily prefigured, where children/disabled people continue to lack social capital and where the most marginal can remain so (Milner & Frawley, 2019). It is a bold inclusive research team that seeks to create new spaces that are not what Thomson (2007, p. 210, after Brock et al., 2001) calls “closed spaces” entered by invitation, but “claimed” or “created” spaces in which new power and possibilities are created.

What spaces can we create together with new affordances and new rules of engagement?

Milner and Frawley (2019, p. 385) describe inclusive research as a “shared space” for advancing “shared and distinct purposes” in which contributions have equal validity. They highlight making room for new processes and outcomes, which requires resisting acculturation to a pre-scripted paradigm. All too often, the marginalized groups involved in inclusive research are trained to take on the explicit and implicit rules and conventions of the academy. This, they argue, means the architecture of the space is all too familiar. This version of inclusive research involves assimilation as children/disabled people migrate from “incompetent” to “imperfect” knowers. The actors have agency, however, and we can conceptualize doing research inclusively as co-creating different kinds of messy, imperfect spaces (Milner & Frawley, 2019; Nind & Vinha, 2014; Thomson, 2007) that challenge the view of child/disabled researchers as other in a subtle reinscription of relational power (Milner & Frawley, 2019). We need to be aware of the likelihood “that ‘the ‘rules’” of this newer

epistemological dance have almost entirely been choreographed within the same institutions the proponents of Inclusive Research methods hold responsible for their original methodological subjugation” (Milner & Frawley, 2019, p. 392). Thus, it is important to ask which problematic practices and technologies we carry forward when “reproducing social spaces of more contemporary research encounters” (Milner & Frawley, 2019, p. 392).

Rather than presenting inclusive research as an ethical panacea for the ills of research, it is clear that the rules of engagement in the research space still need to be questioned by those of us seeking to do research inclusively. We need to be reflexive as we grapple with the ways in which we are historically and geographically situated (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). Just as researchers like Dunne et al. (2018) have sought to illuminate in-between-ness in relation to inclusive education and in-/exclusion, others (including Fine, 1994) have sought to identify the space between insider and outsider, emic and etic perspectives, in research. I maintain we need to understand that there are nuances between research as bad and good spaces. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) refer to a third space—“a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction”. This idea of third space is important for exploring what is possible when we consciously try to disrupt assumptions, practices, and power relations to create a hybrid space of reciprocal understanding (Hall, 2014; Nind et al., 2022; Seale et al., 2015).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that particular kinds of research—defined as inclusive or participatory—offer potential for creating new spaces with new affordances and new rules of engagement. I started with the question of what inclusive research is creating space for and circled back to this at the end. This chapter represents a struggle between form and content, with ideas not always suited to a linear narrative. Moreover, I have drawn on a mix of theoretical ideas about space and interwoven these with a deliberate playing with more everyday spatial metaphors. Ultimately, while I concur with Veck and Hall (2020, p. 1092) that we need to view “inclusive research in education as principally a matter of relations”, I argue that the spatial dimension is critical to these relations—the relationship between space and perspective. Inclusive research is an ethical project to “understand research as a dialogue [that] requires respecting each participant’s capacity for continuing change” (Frank, 2012, p. 37). More than anything else, it is empathetic, intersubjective space that we need to create when doing research inclusively.

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