

The British Psychological Society

DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL AND CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POSITION PAPER

Inclusive education – part of a changing society

The recent drive toward inclusive education is about more than 'special educational needs'. It reflects changes in the social and political climate wherein a new approach characterises thinking about difference.

In recent debate about inclusion, a premium is placed upon full participation by all and respect for the rights of others. Discussion about the benefits of an inclusive society assumes that a society which can nurture, develop and use the skills, talents and strengths of all its members will enlarge its collective resources and ultimately is likely to be more at ease with itself.

These changes in thinking are espoused in much recent discourse about education. Increasingly, this discourse emphasises learners' rights as well as their needs, and stresses the importance of an education free from discrimination and segregation.

Legislation

The new anti-discriminatory climate has provided the basis for much change in policy and statute, nationally and internationally. Inclusion has been enshrined as segregation and discrimination have been rejected and outlawed. Articulations of the new developments in ways of thinking, in policy and in law include:

- The UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1991) which sets out children's rights in respect of freedom from discrimination and in respect of the representation of their wishes and views.
- The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) which calls on all governments to give the highest priority to inclusive education.
- The Human Rights Act (1998) which contains an anti-discrimination article and brings the European Convention on Human Rights into UK legislation; British courts must now adhere to the convention.
- The SEN and Disability Rights in Education Act (2001).

What is inclusive education?

Inclusive education differs from previously held notions of 'integration' and 'mainstreaming', which tended to be concerned principally with 'special educational needs' and implied learners changing or becoming 'ready for' accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept. It is about ...

- rejecting segregation or exclusion of learners for whatever reason – ability, gender, language, care status, family income, disability, sexuality, colour, religion or ethnic origin;
- maximising the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice;
- making learning more meaningful and relevant for all, particularly those learners most vulnerable to exclusionary pressures;

- rethinking and restructuring policies, curricula, cultures and practices in schools and learning environments so that diverse learning needs can be met, whatever the origin or nature of those needs.

Tensions and challenges

Whatever the arguments, it must be recognised that there are many tensions and challenges in moving toward a more inclusive education. Some of the tensions exist around issues of choice and diversity, and for whom; around what constitutes an inclusive learning environment, and whether this has to equate to schools as they are currently structured. Other challenges concern the competing demands of legislative frameworks such as the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act and the 2001 SEN and Disability Act. One of the most pressing issues is about the achievement and management of inclusion of young people who present the most challenging behaviour.

The contribution of applied psychology and psychologists

Not only educational psychologists, but all psychologists – occupational, health, developmental, counselling, clinical and academic – can help schools, colleges and other learning environments to become more inclusive.

- Educational psychologists have for many years laid stress on the environment and the systems within it as part of a move away from an individually orientated, deficit approach to failure. Continuing and developing this emphasis – designing effective learning environments for learners with diverse learning styles and needs – is consistent with the beliefs and precepts behind inclusive education.
- Psychologists will use their skills in applied psychology to help identify, assess and resolve issues of concern, drawing, as they do so, on the abilities and resources of their clients and others in a supportive community.
- Psychologists will use their expertise to engage in research into the development of new ways in which learning environments can become more inclusive.
- Psychologists have a key role to play in the process by which new technology can enhance the capacity of schools and other educational settings to meet the learning needs of all their members – including those learners most vulnerable to exclusion.
- Psychologists will demonstrate an acceptance of difference and diversity, in terms of abilities, values and aspirations held in a plural society.
- Psychologists will work in close collaboration with teachers, parents and others to help schools and other educational settings to develop as more inclusive educational environments.
- Psychologists will work closely with colleagues in all learning environments to foster in learners the attitudes and values expected of citizens of an inclusive society

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