Developing Inclusive Schools

Pathways to Success

Mel Ainscow

Developing Inclusive Schools

In this groundbreaking book, one of the world's leading authorities on ways of developing equitable education systems addresses the greatest challenge facing education systems around the world, that of developing schools that are effective in educating all children. Using evidence from research carried over the last 25 years in many countries, Mel Ainscow explains pathways to be followed in order to turn the global aspiration for inclusion and equity into policy and practices in the field.

Making extensive use of examples from different parts of the world, *Developing Inclusive Schools* provides:

- Practical guidance for teachers regarding ways of making their lessons inclusive;
- Accounts of how this thinking has been implemented in schools;
- Advice for school leaders on how to create an inclusive culture within their organisations;
- Examples of how inclusion and equity have influenced national policies in different contexts;
- Explanations of the implications for policy makers, researchers and teacher educators.

Developing Inclusive Schools will be of huge significance to researchers, educators and practitioners in the fields of education policy and politics, inclusion and special education around the world.

Mel Ainscow is Emeritus Professor, University of Manchester; Professor of Education, University of Glasgow; and Adjunct Professor at Queensland University of Technology. A long-term consultant to UNESCO, he is internationally recognised as an authority on the promotion of inclusion and equity in education.

‘Mel Ainscow draws on a lifetime of passionate and unrelenting commitment to inclusion, equity and professional collaboration to write a book that is one for the ages. He shows how we can and should achieve inclusion by adhering to a small number of general principles but with total respect for the unique nature of every country, culture and context in which these principles are applied. This is the masterwork of inclusion in education’.

Andy Hargreaves, *Boston College and University of Ottawa*

‘An inspirational must-read for anyone concerned with equity in education, this book maps the struggles, the learning and the insights of a leading thinker in the field’.

Lani Florian, *University of Edinburgh*

‘Mel Ainscow has carried out the best and most thorough work I know on grounded system change. He has the examples, he has led the work, he has worked with practitioners, policy makers, communities and students. Read *Developing Inclusive Schools* carefully and fully: it contains a treasure trove of insights’.

Michael Fullan, *OISE/University of Toronto*

‘*Developing Inclusive Schools* is a milestone in understanding how inclusive education developments have evolved during the last three decades. It not only maps and addresses challenges, dilemmas and tensions, but paves the way forward towards more inclusive education systems across the world’.

Renato Opertti, *UNESCO-IBE (International Bureau of Education)*

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Preface

When I started thinking about writing this book, my idea was to produce a second, updated edition of *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, which was first published in 1999. Having taken advice from various colleagues, including Alison Foyle at Routledge, I decided that it had to be a new book.

As the book developed, I came to see it as a sequel to the earlier volume. It reports my efforts to put the suggestions I made over 25 years ago into practice. In doing so, it revisits many of my earlier publications, reworking and refining ideas and reflecting further on examples of practice in the field.

A few months ago, one of my colleagues commented that much of my work involved telling stories. Initially I thought that this was intended as a criticism, but I have come to realise that it is something to celebrate. As this book illustrates, stories can be a powerful way of challenging thinking and encouraging reflection, sometimes leading to action.

Running through these accounts is my own story. Over the years, my work has been related to a variety of headline themes, starting from special education, through to integration, on to inclusive education and then educational equity. Bearing this formulation in mind, the book reflects the evolution of my ideas regarding how to foster inclusion and fairness within education systems (see Ainscow 2016a, for a detailed account of this process). In particular, my thinking has moved in the following directions:

- From a narrow focus on special education to a much wider concern with processes, I have called *school improvement with attitude*;
- From efforts to achieve integration for particular groups of learners towards the development of inclusive forms of education that focus on the *presence, participation and achievement* of all children and young people;
- From an analysis of the characteristics of individual learners to the analysis of *barriers and resources* that exist within particular learning contexts;
- From an emphasis on the development of individual schools towards efforts to achieve system-level reform through a focus on *levers for change*.

A pattern emerges from the accounts I provide. This involves periods of uncertainly as my thinking was challenged by new experiences and different

contexts, through a process I have described as *making the familiar unfamiliar*. What also becomes evident is the way that working with colleagues has helped me to cope with these disturbances, such that they often became critical incidents that led to developments in my ideas.

Given the range of projects reported in this book, it is inevitable that lots of colleagues have been involved, far too many to name here. In some instances, their names are mentioned in the references I list. Many of these are colleagues at the Universities of Manchester and Glasgow and at Queensland University of Technology. And, of course, I owe a debt of gratitude to the many teachers, students and policymakers with whom I have cooperated.

Finally, I owe a particular thanks to Alan Dyson and Kiki Messiou who each read and commented on earlier drafts of the text. As on many other occasions over the last 25 years, their challenging comments, perceptive advice and professional guidance were of enormous importance.

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1 Taking an inclusive turn

In the concluding paragraph of my 1999 book, *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, I commented on the evaluation I had carried out with colleagues of an initiative to reform kindergarten education in Anhui Province, China. I explained that we had concluded that the project had been successful, not least in drawing the attention of teachers in the schools to new possibilities for reaching out to children in their local communities who had previously been excluded. Over the gateway to one of the kindergartens was a motto that seemed to be guiding their efforts. It read, *All for the children, for all the children*. What I witnessed in many of the classrooms reflected the commitment of the teachers to this principle.

With this principle in mind, this book focuses on what is arguably the greatest challenge facing education systems around the world, that of finding ways of including all children and young people in schools. In economically poorer countries this is mainly about the millions of children who are not able to attend formal education (UNESCO 2020). Meanwhile, in wealthier countries, such as my own, many young people leave school with no worthwhile qualifications, whilst others are placed in special provision away from mainstream education and some choose to drop out since the lessons seem irrelevant (OECD 2012). Across these diverse contexts, learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation, as are those with disabilities and others from minority groups.

Faced with these challenges, there is evidence of an increased interest internationally in the idea of making schools more inclusive and education systems more equitable (Ainscow 2020a). However, the field remains confused as to the actions needed in order to address this challenge. In the chapters that follow, I set out to provide some clarity on what needs to be done to move schools and, indeed, educational systems forward. In particular, I describe my search for pathways to success.

In this introductory chapter I begin by explaining the basis of my argument, linking this to the ideas I presented in my 1999 book *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools.*

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An inclusive turn

Whilst recent years have seen an increased interest in the idea of inclusive education, the field remains confused as to what this implies. Indeed, I recall hearing the Australian academic Roger Slee comment that the idea has travelled so much that it has become *jet lagged*.

In many countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. However, internationally, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (UNESCO 2020). As such, it presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and abilities.

Traditionally, the main response to difficulties experienced by learners has been through forms of special education. In recent years, this field has gone through a crisis of thinking about its guiding assumptions. As a result, the appropriateness of separate systems of education has been challenged, both from a human rights perspective and from the point of view of effectiveness (Tomlinson 2017). More specifically, it is argued that the continued use of what is sometimes referred to as a *medical model* of assessment – within which educational difficulties are explained in terms of a child's deficits – prevents progress in the field, not least because it distracts attention from questions about why schools fail to teach so many children successfully.

With this agenda as my overall focus, I have argued that what is needed is an *inclusive turn* (Ainscow 2006). This represents a radical new approach to the way that difficulties in education are defined and addressed. As I will explain, this change is difficult to introduce, not least because the traditional perspectives and practices associated with the field of special education continue to dominate thinking in the field, encouraged by what Sally Tomlinson (2012) refers to as *an expanded and expensive SEN industry*.

Throughout this book, I argue that an inclusive turn is more likely in contexts where there is a culture of collaboration that encourages and supports problem-solving. This involves those within a particular context in working together to address barriers to education experienced by some learners. It also necessitates supportive relationships between teachers, learners, families and others involved in the lives of young people.

A sequel

This book should be seen as a sequel to *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, which was published 25 years ago. In writing that earlier book, my aim was to stimulate and challenge those concerned with school effectiveness and improvement to consider how far their work really has taken account of the learning of *all* children. At the same time, I set out to challenge those involved in the field of special education to reconsider their roles in the light of this different perspective.

The ideas that I explored and the suggestions I made in that earlier book were, at the time, radical. They arose as a result of reflections on experience of working with teachers and schools over previous years, in the United Kingdom and overseas. In particular they had arisen from my involvement in two large-scale projects. The first of these was a school improvement project, Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA), which involved a small team of university academics collaborating with English schools during what proved to be an unprecedented period of national educational reform. The experiences of this project led us to rethink many of our assumptions as to how school improvement can be achieved, noting in particular the way local histories and circumstances bear upon the improvement efforts of individual schools (Hopkins, Ainscow and West 1994).

The second project was a UNESCO teacher education initiative to do with the development of more integrated forms of schooling. This project, called *Special Needs in the Classroom*, originally involved research in eight countries (i.e. Canada, Chile, India, Jordan, Kenya, Malta, Spain and Zimbabwe) and subsequently led to dissemination activities of various kinds in over 50 countries (Ainscow 1994).

During the early phases of the UNESCO project, it was assumed that materials and methods would be developed that could be distributed in a straightforward way for use in different parts of the world. Gradually those of us leading the project came to realise, as others involved in international development activities in education had done (e.g. Fuller and Clark 1994), that schooling is so closely tied to local conditions and cultures that the importation of practices from elsewhere is fraught with difficulties. In other words, learning from other people – particularly those who live their lives in faraway places – is by no means straightforward!

The experiences of these two initiatives had major implications for the development of the thinking and practice I described in the 1999 book. In particular, they led me to reflect on how we can develop understandings that will be useful in encouraging the development of schools that will be successful in fostering the participation and learning of all students within a community. This pointed to questions such as: how do we make use of the diversity of experience and knowledge that exists within any given context to support the improvement of educational arrangements? At the same time, how can we learn from the experiences of others in ways that can support the development of practice? If so, what is the nature of the learning that might occur?

Learning from differences

In addressing these questions, the 1999 book reflected on my own experiences of working alongside practitioners to illustrate ways in which an engagement with differences can stimulate new thinking about the issue of reaching out to all learners. Throughout the text, I used examples based on observations made in schools and classrooms in various parts of the world in order to show how

such experiences had stimulated a reconsideration of my thinking about practice in my own country. This led me to argue that the power of comparison for the development of practice comes not from lifting approaches and moving them from place to place but from using the stimulus of more exotic environments to reconsider thinking and practice in familiar settings (Delamont 1992). It is about making what is strange familiar and what is familiar strange, as when seeing your own town in a new light when showing a visitor round. Features that are normally ignored become clearer, possibilities that have been overlooked are reconsidered and things that have become taken for granted are subject to new scrutiny.

The shifts in my thinking that took place as a result of these two projects involved a reconceptualisation of how some children come to be marginalised within or even excluded from schools. This shift drew attention to many possibilities for the development of schools that might easily have been overlooked. It also helped me to realise that a concern with local context has to be at the heart of any development activities, whether these are concerned with classrooms, schools or overall education systems.

In this way I also became aware of the importance of existing practice as the essential starting point for our efforts. Indeed, as my colleagues and I looked more closely at what was going on in the classrooms in which we worked, we realised that very often much of the expertise that was needed in order to reach out to all learners was already there. As a result, the strategy becomes less about importing ideas from elsewhere and more to do with finding ways of making better use of local knowledge. Put simply, our experience is that schools know more than they use! Therefore, the task becomes essentially one of helping teachers, and those supporting them, to analyse their own practices as a basis for collaboration and experimentation.

Definitions

In *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, I argued that the agenda of educational improvement should be concerned with overcoming contextual barriers that may be experienced by any student. However, the tendency at the time was (and still is today) to think of inclusive education as being concerned only with students with disabilities and others categorised as having *special educational needs*. Furthermore, inclusion is often seen as simply involving the movement of students from special to mainstream contexts, with the implication that they are *included* once they are there.

In contrast, I see inclusion as a never-ending process, rather than a simple change of state, and as dependent on continuous pedagogical and organisational developments within mainstream schools. The implication is that every school is inclusive to some extent and that all schools have to continue a never-ending process of finding ways of reaching new students who bring with them new challenges.

In taking this thinking forward, it is important to emphasise the positive benefits of inclusion for parents and children rather than seeing inclusion as an ideological principle to be accepted as an article of faith. Specifically, it is helpful to emphasise the distinction between needs, rights and opportunities. All children have needs (e.g. for appropriate teaching), but they also have the right to participate fully in a common social institution (a local mainstream school) that offers a range of opportunities for them. The current system in many countries often forces parents to choose between ensuring that their child's needs are met (which often implies placement in special provision of some form) and ensuring that they have the same rights and opportunities as other children (which implies mainstream school placement). The aim therefore should be to create a system where these choices become unnecessary.

A narrow view of inclusion has particularly limited validity in economically poorer nations, though, as I show in later chapters, experiences in such countries may cause reflection on the appropriate focus of policy in wealthier countries. It is clear that in any country, a lack of facilities, the need for curriculum reform, insufficient or inappropriate teacher education, poor school attendance, problems of family poverty, cultural dislocation, the conditions giving rise to street children, problems of disease and differences between the language of instruction and the home language may be as important as issues of disability in affecting participation in schools.

All of this moves the issue of inclusion to the centre of discussions about the improvement of schooling. Rather than being a somewhat marginal theme, concerned with how a relatively small group of students might be attached to mainstream schools, it lays the foundations for an approach that can lead to the transformation of the system itself. Of course, none of this is easy, not least in that it requires the active support of everybody involved in the business of schooling, some of whom may be reluctant to address the challenges that I present.

In this respect my work has a particular message for those, like me, who have previously made their careers in the special education field. We have to be clear about our purposes and self-critical about the approaches we use. Too often our contributions have unintentionally acted as barriers to the development of more inclusive forms of schooling.

Ingredients

Bearing these concerns in mind, my 1999 book went on to explain how an engagement with less familiar contexts can stimulate a process of critical reflection, thus enabling previous experiences to be reconsidered and new possibilities for improvement to be recognised. In my own case this drew attention to a series of propositions that have continued to guide my school improvement efforts.

To be clear, these ideas do not represent a recipe that can be lifted and applied in any context. Rather they should be seen as a series of *ingredients* that can guide the development of schools in order that they can become more effective in reaching out to all learners.

I went on to explain these ingredients as follows:

Ingredient 1. Use existing practices and knowledge as starting points for development

It took me a long time to appreciate that existing practice represents the best starting point for development activities, not least because of my previous experience and training in the field of special education. Specifically, it took me many years to recognise that the ways in which earlier attempts to develop integrated arrangements for students defined as having special needs had often, unintentionally, undermined our efforts. As we tried to integrate such students into mainstream schools, we imported practices derived from earlier experience in special provision. What we learned was that many of these approaches were simply not feasible in primary and secondary schools. At the same time, their use tended to encourage new forms of segregation, albeit within mainstream school settings.

Here, I am thinking in particular of the individualised responses based on assessments and programmes of support for individuals of the sort that have been the predominant orientation within the special education world. For many years this was very much the orientation that shaped my own work (e.g. Ainscow and Muncey 1989; Ainscow and Tweddle 1979, 1984). Gradually, however, experience taught me that such approaches do not fit with the ways in which mainstream teachers plan and go about their work. For all sorts of sensible and understandable reasons, the planning frame of such teachers has to be that of the whole class. Apart from any other considerations, the sheer numbers of children in the class and the intensity of the teacher's day make this inevitable.

Consequently, when integration efforts are dependent upon the importation of practices from special education, they usually lead to difficulties. Indeed, they are likely to involve yet new forms of segregation, albeit within mainstream settings (Fulcher 1989), through the use of what Slee (1996) calls *dividing practices*. For example, in some countries, we have seen the proliferation of often untrained classroom assistants who work with some of the most vulnerable children and their individual programmes in mainstream schools. When such support is withdrawn, teachers feel that they can no longer cope. Meanwhile, the legal requirement for individualised education plans in some countries has encouraged colleagues in schools to feel that even more children will require such responses, thus creating massive budget problems.

The gradual recognition that schools for all will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking and practice into mainstream contexts opened my mind to new possibilities that I had previously failed to recognise. Many of these relate to the need to move away from the individualised planning frame, referred to above, to a perspective that emphasises a concern for and an engagement with the whole class. Thus, as an Italian teacher explained many years ago, what is needed are strategies that *personalise* rather than individualise learning.

In the 1999 book I argued that an understanding of what these strategies might involve can be gained from the study of practice, particularly the practice of class teachers in primary schools and subject teachers in secondary schools. As my awareness of the value of such studies developed, so my interest in observing and trying to understand practice grew. This led me to argue that a scrutiny of the practice of what we sometimes call *ordinary teachers* provides the best starting point for understanding how classrooms can be made more inclusive.

Ingredient 2. See difference as opportunities for learning rather than problems to be fixed

In *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, I argued that attempts to reach out to all learners will be influenced by the ways in which student differences are perceived. At the risk of oversimplifying what is undoubtedly a complicated issue, I suggested two possibilities. On the one hand differences may be seen in a normative way. This means that students are defined in terms of certain taken-for-granted criteria of normality, against which some come to be seen as being abnormal. Within such an orientation those who do not fit into existing arrangements are seen as needing attention elsewhere or, at least, assimilation into the status quo. Alternatively, perceptions may be guided by a view that all students are unique, with their own experiences, interests and aptitudes. Associated with this second, transformative orientation is a belief that schools have to be developed in ways that can take advantage of this diversity which is, therefore, seen as a stimulus for learning and development.

Here some of the traditional practices of many Western countries, including my own, have discouraged movement towards a transformative approach. Specifically, the tradition has been to perceive some students' differences as requiring a technical response of some kind (Heshusius 1989; Iano 1986). This leads to a concern with finding the *right* response, i.e. different teaching methods or materials for students who do not respond to existing arrangements. Implicit in this formulation is a view that schools are rational organisations offering an appropriate

range of opportunities, that those students who experience difficulties do so because of their limitations or disadvantages and that *they*, therefore, are in need of some form of special intervention (Skrtic 1991). It is my argument that through such assumptions, leading to a search for effective responses to those children perceived as being *different*, vast opportunities for developments in practice and improvements in schools are overlooked.

I accept, of course, that it is important to identify useful and promising strategies. However, I believe that it is erroneous to assume that systematic replication of particular methods in themselves will generate successful learning, especially when we are considering populations that historically have been marginalised or even excluded from schools. This led me to argue that an emphasis on a search for *quick-fix* methods often serves to obscure attention from more significant questions such as, why do we fail to teach some students successfully?

Consequently, I argued that it is necessary to shift away from a narrow and mechanistic view of teaching to one that is broader in scope and takes into account wider contextual factors. In particular it is important to resist the temptation of what Bartolome (1994) refers to as the *methods fetish* in order to create learning environments that are informed by both action and reflection. In this way, by freeing themselves from the uncritical adoption of so-called effective strategies, teachers can begin the reflective process that will allow them to recreate and reinvent teaching methods and materials, taking into account contextual realities that can either limit or expand possibilities for improvements in learning.

It is important to remember, too, that schools, like other social institutions, are influenced by perceptions of socioeconomic status, race, language and gender. This being the case, I argued that it is essential to question how such perceptions influence classroom interactions. In this way the emphasis on methods must be broadened to reveal deeply entrenched deficit views of *difference*, which define certain types of students as *lacking something* (Trent, Artiles and Englert 1998). Specifically, we have to be vigilant in scrutinising how such deficit assumptions may be influencing perceptions of certain students.

Teaching methods are neither devised nor implemented in a vacuum. Design, selection and use of particular teaching approaches and strategies arise from perceptions about learning and learners. In this respect even the most pedagogically advanced methods are likely to be ineffective in the hands of those who implicitly or explicitly subscribe to a belief system that regards some students, at best, as disadvantaged and in need of fixing, or, worse, as deficient and, therefore, beyond fixing.

This so-called deficit model has been subject to massive criticism over many years (e.g. Ballard 1997; Dyson 1990; Fulcher 1989; Oliver 1988; Trent, Artiles and Englert 1998). This has helped to encourage a shift of thinking that moves explanations of educational failure away from

a concentration on the characteristics of individual children and their families towards a consideration of the process of schooling. However, despite good intentions deficit thinking is still deeply ingrained and too often leads many to believe that some students have to be dealt with in a separate way. In a sense it confirms the view that some students are *them* rather than part of *us* (Booth and Ainscow 1998).

This further encourages the marginalisation of some students, whilst at the same time distracting attention away from the possibility that their presence can help to stimulate the development of practices that might well benefit all students. In other words, I argued, those who do not respond to existing arrangements should be regarded as *hidden voices* who, under certain conditions, can encourage the improvement of schools. In this way, differences can be seen as opportunities for learning rather than as problems to be fixed.

Ingredient 3. Scrutinise barriers to student participation

The approach to inclusion that I suggested in my 1999 book involves *a process of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, school curricula, cultures and communities.* In this way the notions of inclusion and exclusion are linked together because the process of increasing participation of students entails the reduction of pressures to exclude. This link also encourages us to look at the various constellations of pressures acting on different groups of students and acting on the same students from different sources.

For these reasons, I suggested that yet another starting point for the development of practice within a school has to be with a close scrutiny of how existing practices and organisational arrangements may be acting as barriers to the *presence, participation and learning* of some learners. This means that attention has to be given to helping practitioners to develop a reflective attitude to their work such that they are continually encouraged to explore ways of overcoming such contextual barriers. With this in mind, the approaches discussed in my earlier book placed considerable emphasis on the need to observe the process of schooling and to listen carefully to the views of those involved.

In adopting this same perspective in the chapters that follow, many illustrations of what form this can take are provided, as well as examples of methods for analysing contexts that have been found to be helpful. As I will explain, all of this is part of a form of action research that I call collaborative inquiry, a phrase that I adopted from the work of other scholars (i.e. Reason and Bradbury 2001).

Ingredient 4. Make effective use of available resources to support learning

I explained in my earlier book that a feature of lessons that seem to be effective in encouraging student participation is the way available resources, particularly human resources, are used to support learning. In particular, I emphasised the importance of a range of resources that is available in all classrooms and yet is often poorly used – that of the students themselves.

Within any classroom the students represent a rich source of experiences, inspiration, challenge and support which, if utilised, can inject an enormous supply of additional energy into the tasks and activities that are set. However, all of this is dependent upon the skills of the teacher in harnessing this energy. This is, in part, a matter of attitude, depending upon a recognition that students have the capacity to contribute to one another's learning, recognising also that, in fact, learning is to a large degree a social process.

This thinking can help teachers to develop the skills necessary to organise classrooms that encourage this social process of learning. Here we can learn much from some of the economically poorer countries of the South, where limitations of resources have sometimes led to a recognition of the potential of *peer power*, through the development of *child-to-child* programmes (Hawes 1988). Meanwhile, in Western countries, the idea of cooperative group work has led to the development of teaching specifications that have enormous potential to create richer learning environments (e.g. Johnson and Johnson 1989).

Ingredient 5. Develop a language of practice amongst teachers

Much of the earlier work with schools that I described in my 1999 book involved attempts to strengthen the capacity of schools to handle change. This led me to look closely at schools where improvement efforts had led to changes in practice to see what lessons might be learned from their experiences.

In stating that, however, I was not suggesting that our engagement with such a school would help to devise blueprints that can point the way forward for all schools. What I have learnt as a result of many years of working in schools to support the introduction of a variety of innovations is that they are complex and idiosyncratic places. What seems to help development in one school may have no impact or even a negative effect in another.

So, whilst we can, I believe, learn through vicarious experiences, this learning has to be respected for its own qualities. Essentially it is a form of learning that provides a stimulus to reflect on existing experience and current understandings rather than a means of providing prescriptions that can be transposed to other environments. Consistent with this view, throughout the chapters that follow, I provide many examples of classroom encounters and school processes that have provided me with such a stimulus.

Ingredient 6. Create conditions in schools that encourage a degree of risk-taking

My interest in studying practice took me beyond just a consideration of the work of individual teachers. Much of my early research convinced me of the importance of the school context in creating a climate within which more effective practices can be developed. The nature of such positive contexts can take many forms, and, therefore, attempts at generalisations are very difficult. Nevertheless, my monitoring of developments in particular schools, over time, suggests certain patterns that are at least worthy of consideration.

In particular, these experiences led me to define a series of organisational conditions that seem to facilitate the risk-taking that seems to be associated with movements towards more inclusive practices. More specifically they indicate that such movement is not about making marginal adjustments to existing arrangements but rather about asking fundamental questions about the way the organisation is currently structured, focusing on aspects such as patterns of leadership, processes of planning and policies for staff development. In this way the development of inclusive schools comes to be seen as a process of school improvement (Ainscow 1995).

My impression is that when schools are successful in moving their practice forward, this tends to have a more general impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work. In this way a school begins to take on some of the features of what Senge (1989) calls a learning organisation, i.e. *an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future* (p. 14). Or, to borrow a useful phrase from Rosenholtz (1989), it becomes *a moving school*, one that is continually seeking to develop and refine its responses to the challenges it meets.

I argued that, as schools move in such directions, the cultural changes that occur can also impact on the ways in which teachers perceive students in their classes whose progress is a matter of concern. What may happen is that as the overall climate in a school improves, such children are gradually

seen in a more positive light. Rather than simply presenting problems that have to be overcome or, possibly, referred elsewhere for separate attention, such students may be perceived as providing feedback on existing classroom arrangements. Indeed, they may be seen as sources of understanding as to how these arrangements might be improved in ways that would be of benefit to all students. If this is the case, as I have already suggested, the children sometimes referred to as having special needs represent hidden voices that could inform and guide improvement activities in the future. In this sense, as my colleague Susan Hart suggested, special needs are special in that they provide insights into possibilities for development that might otherwise pass unnoticed (Hart 1992).

It is important to recognise, of course, that the cultural changes necessary to achieve schools that are able to hear and respond to the *hidden voices* are in many cases a profound one. Traditional school cultures, supported by rigid organisational arrangements, teacher isolation and high levels of specialisms amongst staff who are geared to predetermined tasks, are often in trouble when faced with unexpected circumstances. On the other hand, the presence of children who are not suited to the existing *menu* of the school provides some encouragement to explore a more collegiate culture within which teachers are supported in experimenting with new teaching responses. In this way problem-solving activities may gradually become the reality-defining, taken-for-granted functions that are the culture of the inclusive school, i.e. a school that is attempting to reach out to all students in the community.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have summarised the ideas that I presented in my 1999 book, *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools*, as overlapping and interconnected by the idea that attempts to reach out to all learners within a school have to include the adults as well as the students. I argue that schools make progress towards more inclusive arrangements through a process of growth that leads to the development of conditions within which every member of the school community is encouraged to be a learner.

Twenty-five years later, the approaches to the promotion of inclusive schools recommended in this book build on and take forward these same ideas. As such, they are less about the introduction of particular techniques, or new organisational arrangements, and much more about processes of social learning within particular contexts.

I argue that the use of evidence as a means of stimulating experimentation and collaboration should be seen as a central strategy. As Copland (2003) suggests, inquiry can be the *engine* to enable the distribution of leadership that is needed in order to foster participation in learning and the *glue* that can bind a community together around a common purpose.

All of this has major implications for leadership practice within schools and across education systems. In particular, it calls for efforts to encourage coordinated and sustained efforts around the idea that changing outcomes for vulnerable groups of students is unlikely to be achieved unless there are changes in the thinking of adults. Consequently, the starting point must be with policy makers and practitioners: in effect, enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved and increasing their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling taken-for-granted assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours.

Chapter summaries

The chapters that follow explore the implications of this thinking for policy and practice in the field. In summary, they are as follows:

Chapter 2, **Searching for pathways,** presents a radical challenge to thinking in the field regarding the idea of inclusive education. Contrasting this with the predominant approach – that of serving children with disabilities within general education settings – it is argued that the aim of inclusive education must be to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such, it represents a major challenge to existing thinking regarding the development of education systems. A roadmap for promoting an inclusive dialogue within schools is provided by the *Index for Inclusion*, a review instrument developed originally for use in England but now available in many countries. The chapter goes on to describe the changes that have occurred with regard to global thinking since 1990. In so doing, it indicates the ways in which my ideas have influenced these international policy moves. I then go on to describe a series of studies carried out since the publication of my 1999 book that inform the rationale presented in subsequent chapters. All of these studies involved groups of university researchers in supporting, recording and analysing collaborative inquiries as they occurred in project schools.

Chapter 3, **Developing schools for all**, explains my attempts to contribute *directly* to thinking and practice in relation to inclusive developments in schools. For many years I have worked closely with educational practitioners, in my own country and overseas, as they have attempted to move towards more inclusive ways of working. Acting as a critical friend, I see my task as helping them to learn from their experiences and, in so doing, to point to patterns and examples of practice that might be instructive to others who are addressing similar agendas. In this sense my aim is not to propose recipes that can be applied universally but rather to suggest ingredients that might be worthy of further consideration within particular contexts. In this chapter I use examples from the field in order to explain the nature and potential of this approach.

Chapter 4, Promoting inclusive practices, explores how partnerships between practitioners and researchers can facilitate developments in practice. This involves an engagement with evidence generated through a range of methods, much of which involve listening to the voices of those involved in processes of education, particularly the views of students. I argue that such evidence can make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that challenge assumptions, encourage the sharing of ideas and stimulate joint efforts to develop more inclusive practices. However, none of this provides a simple way forward. To gain the potential benefits, it is necessary to address the challenges involved in using processes of collaborative inquiry within the busy contexts of schools and in contexts where many other barriers exist.

In **Chapter 5, Using collaborative inquiry**, I provide practical guidance on methods for promoting inclusive developments in schools. It is important to stress that this guidance does not take the form of a blueprint to be followed rigidly. Rather, it is intended to be adapted by those leading developments in particular contexts. Examples are used to illustrate how different forms of evidence can be used to identify and address barriers experienced by learners. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of observation and engaging with the views of learners. The implications for relationships are also examined, including the roles of those who have leadership tasks.

Chapter 6, Leading inclusive school development, stresses the importance of contextual factors in helping to promote inclusive thinking and practices. In particular, it focuses on the importance of the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. I argue that progress in relation to inclusion depends on the extent to which these values include the acceptance and celebration of difference, and a commitment to offering educational opportunities to all students, coupled with the extent to which they are shared across a school staff. Guidance is provided as to how relevant leadership practices can be developed.

Widening the agenda, **Chapter 7, Changing education systems,** argues that the extent to which schools can move in an inclusive direction is much influenced by external factors, not least those associated with national policies as they are implemented at the local area level. With this in mind, the chapter uses experience of working with policy makers in attempts to move thinking and practice forward in relation to inclusion in schools. Reflecting on these experiences, the chapter suggests a series of propositions that can be used to promote equity more widely across education systems in ways that will facilitate the development of inclusive schools. The sorts of factors that make it difficult to implement these ideas are explained, including the current emphasis on the so-called *what works* approach to educational improvement.

Chapter 8, Addressing barriers, looks more closely at the concerns raised in the previous chapter about the difficulties involved in the introduction

of efforts to promote inclusion and equity within education systems. Using examples from England, Wales, Cyprus, Uruguay and Scotland, it suggests that there are many sources of inequity in education, related to political, economic, social, cultural and institutional factors, and that these factors vary both within and across countries. This means that whilst lessons can undoubtedly be learned from the accounts provided, they must be interpreted and applied with care. Reflecting on these experiences, the chapter explains that barriers facing students can arise from pressures on schools created by national policies, assessment and accountability measures. In addition, the attitudes and actions of practitioners in the light of these factors sometimes act as further barriers to the presence, participation and achievements of learners.

Chapter 9, Facing new challenges, focuses on new developments that are influencing education policies in various countries. To illustrate the possibilities and challenges that these create, the chapter focuses on developments in England, where recent years have seen efforts by successive governments to improve the education system. These have involved an increased emphasis on the idea of allowing schools greater autonomy within a policy context based on market forces as the main improvement strategy. This approach to educational development is a growing international trend that has major implications for the promotion of equity. It is argued that, whilst school autonomy can be a positive force, it requires coordination at the local level and the introduction of accountability arrangements that provide space for experimentation as well as resources to promote the professional development of teachers.

Finally, **Chapter 10, Reaching out to all learners,** reflects further on what I have learnt over the last 25 years about how to develop inclusive schools. Keeping in mind the importance of context when thinking about educational developments, this leads me to focus on finding local pathways that help identify and addressing barriers that are limiting the presence, progress and achievement of learners. As I argue throughout this book, this requires a collective will amongst stakeholders, using evidence to stimulate and guide their efforts. With this in mind, I reflect on national developments in the Netherlands and Portugal, each of which presents interesting and instructive patterns of development. Reflecting on these experiences, and others described throughout the book, the chapter provides a guiding framework that can be used to identify pathways that can help promote inclusion and equity within particular education systems. The chapter concludes by considering the implications for the roles of research and researchers in helping to move thinking and practice forward.

Telling stories

Throughout the chapters that follow, stories from the field are told to illustrate the arguments being developed. These accounts reflect the importance

of explicitly articulating and sharing what Warren, Park and Tieken (2016, p. 252) call our *stories of self – stories that articulate the deeply embedded values that shape our identities and purpose as researchers.*

At the same time, the stories are influenced by a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin 2019), in that they are intended to provide readers with a sense of what it is like for those in the field who become involved in attempts to engage with evidence to stimulate improvements in practice and policy. In this way, I have it in mind to make the familiar unfamiliar, not least by providing accounts from across different national contexts.

The stories take two forms:

- **Vignettes** – these shorter anecdotes are used to illustrate the arguments developed in the text and
- **Accounts of practice** – these longer examples are intended to provide readers with a richer sense of the circumstances and events being described.

Many of the examples I provide took place in the United Kingdom. When they come from other parts of the world, this is made clear.

In considering these examples it is important to take account of the circumstances in which they take place. As I stress throughout this book, as far as educational developments are concerned, *contexts matter*. With this in mind, I am concerned to avoid the mistake made by some commentators who, in seeking to present arguments that have global significance, fall into the trap of oversimplifying educational processes and practices by ignoring problems of interpretation and translation. At the same time, I am conscious that, as a visitor to these contexts, my own understandings are always partial and, in some instances, may even be mistaken.