

# Inclusive special education: development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities

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**Inclusive education and special education are based on different philosophies and provide alternative views of education for children with special educational needs and disabilities. They are increasingly regarded as diametrically opposed in their approaches. This article presents a theory of *inclusive special education* that comprises a synthesis of the philosophy, values and practices of inclusive education with the interventions, strategies and procedures of special education. Development of *inclusive special education* aims to provide a vision and guidelines for policies, procedures and teaching strategies that will facilitate the provision of effective education for all children with special educational needs and disabilities.**

***Key words:* inclusive education, special education, special educational needs, disabilities**

The most controversial issue currently regarding the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is that of inclusion (Farrell, 2010; Kauffman & Badar, 2014a; Slee, 2011). Theories of inclusion and inclusive education have important implications for special education policies and practices

in both developed and developing countries (Artiles et al., 2011; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014).

Inclusive education is generally considered to be a multi-dimensional concept that includes the celebration and valuing of difference and diversity, consideration of human rights, social justice and equity issues, as well as of a social model of disability and a socio-political model of education. It also encompasses the process of school transformation and a focus on children's entitlement and access to education (Kozleski et al., 2011; Loreman et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2005; Slee, 2011; Smith, 2010; Topping, 2012).

Salend (2011) distils from the literature on inclusive education four key principles through which the philosophy of inclusion is put into practice. These are, firstly, providing all learners with challenging, engaging and flexible general education curricula; secondly, embracing diversity and responsiveness to individual strengths and challenges; thirdly, using reflective practices and differentiated instruction; and fourthly, establishing a community based on collaboration among students, teachers, families, other professionals and community agencies. Inclusive education, therefore, aims to provide a facilitative and constructive focus for improving the education of children with SEND.

In stark contrast to the above views, some writers have argued that inclusive education results in the sacrifice of children for the sake of misplaced ideology (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005) and others that:

‘Ironically, the promotion of the delusion that being present in a school equates with being socially and educationally included, is one of the most dishonest and insidious forms of exclusion.’

(Cooper & Jacobs, 2011, p. 6)

Others have suggested that inclusion has become a fashionable term (Armstrong et al., 2010) and that, like high fashion, the genuine article is often considered impractical and unaffordable for most people in the world.

Despite these negative views, the vision of inclusion still exerts a major influence on the education culture of many countries. Recently, Norwich (2013) has stated that, ‘Inclusion as a concept and value is now recognized as complex with multiple meanings.’ Armstrong et al. (2010) are in agreement and point out that the term inclusion is used in so many different ways that it can mean different things to different people, or all things to all people, so unless it is

clearly defined it becomes meaningless. Therefore, it is important to clarify the meaning and implications of inclusion with regard to the education of children with SEND.

It is now widely recognised that the policy of ‘full inclusion’, with its vision of *all* children being educated in mainstream classrooms for all or most of their time at school is impossible to achieve in practice. This is because it is considered that there will always be some children with SEND who cannot be successfully included in mainstream classrooms, which sets a limit to the proportion of children who can be effectively educated in mainstream schools (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Hansen, 2012; Kauffman & Badar, 2014a; Thomas & Loxley, 2007).

Since the vision of full inclusion is therefore unachievable and that of inclusive education is unclear, it is considered that what is now needed is a new vision for the education of children with SEND to replace those of inclusive education and special education. It is proposed that this will best be achieved by developing a theory of *inclusive special education* which synthesises philosophies, policies and practices from both special education and inclusive education in order to present a clear vision of effective education for all children with SEND.

The term *inclusive special education* has been previously used to describe the special education system in Finland, in which around 22% of children receive part-time special education and 8% are in full-time special classes (Takala et al., 2009). This special education system has been considered to be one of the possible reasons for the high overall levels of academic achievement gained by children in Finland in international surveys. For example, Finland was ranked first in science and second in reading and mathematics of all the countries involved in the Programme for International Student Assessment survey published in 2006 (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). The theory of *inclusive special education* proposed in this article includes some elements of the special education system in Finland, but is more comprehensive in addressing the education of all children with SEND in mainstream schools, special schools and special classes within mainstream schools.

In this article the need for developing the theory of *inclusive special education*, comprising a synthesis of special education and inclusive education, is explained. Currently these two fields provide contrasting views about ways of meeting the needs of children with SEND. This article presents a model for integrating the two approaches and elaborates on strategies for providing effective education for all children with SEND, wherever they are educated.

The article first sets the scene by defining special education and inclusive education and identifying several confusions surrounding inclusive education. Considering each of these confusions leads to clarification of the theory of *inclusive special education* and the development of a model that combines aspects of both inclusive education and special education in order to form *inclusive special education*, the goal of which is to ensure that all children with SEND are effectively educated in special or mainstream facilities from early childhood through secondary school education.

Salend (2011) defines special education as characterised by:

- individual assessment and planning;
- specialised instruction;
- intensive instruction;
- goal-directed instruction;
- research-based instructional practices;
- collaborative partnerships;
- student performance evaluation.

In contrast, Salend (2011) defines inclusive education as characterised by:

- a philosophy of acceptance and belonging within a community;
- a philosophy of student, family, educator and community collaboration;
- celebration of the diversity and value of all learners;
- valuing educating learners in high-quality schools;
- valuing educating learners alongside their age peers;
- valuing educating learners in mainstream classrooms;
- valuing educating learners in schools in their local community.

So it is clear from the above that inclusive education and special education are based on different philosophies and provide alternative approaches to the education of children with SEND. In fact, they are now increasingly regarded as diametrically opposed in their approaches to providing education for children with SEND. This is a confusing situation for professionals in the field of education as well as for parents of children with SEND.

Therefore, it is considered that what is needed is a new theory that integrates theory and research from both approaches in order to provide effective education for all children with SEND. This article, and the book on which it is based (Hornby, 2014), proposes to do this by developing a theory of *inclusive special*

*education* that will comprise a synthesis of the philosophy and values of inclusive education with the practices and procedures of special education. In this way *inclusive special education* will provide the philosophy and guidelines for policies, procedures and teaching strategies that will facilitate the provision of effective education for all children with SEND. In order to aid the development of this new theory, it is useful to consider current confusions about inclusive education.

### **Confusions about inclusive education**

Several important confusions about inclusion and inclusive education that have been highlighted in the literature are discussed below. These are about definitions, rights, labelling, peers, aetiology, intervention models, goals, curricula, reality, finance, means and ends, and research evidence. Following clarification of each of these confusions, it is made clear how this will be addressed within *inclusive special education*.

#### *Definitions*

There is confusion about what is meant by inclusion, as noted by Norwich when he states, 'its definition and use are seriously problematic' (quoted in Terzi, 2010). The term 'inclusion' is used in various ways, for example, to refer to inclusive schools or an inclusive society. Many sources (for example, DfEE, 1997; MoE, 2010) refer to advancing 'inclusive education' as meaning increasing the proportion of children with SEND in mainstream schools, while maintaining special schools for those who need them. In contrast, other sources (for example, CSIE, 1989, 2002) use the term 'inclusion' to describe a state of affairs in which all children are educated in regular classrooms within mainstream schools with only temporary withdrawal from this situation for purposes such as individual or group work or therapy.

The most serious issue about the meaning of inclusion is that caused by the confusion of social inclusion with inclusive education for children with SEND (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012). The term social inclusion is typically used to refer to the goal of bringing about an inclusive society, one in which all individuals are valued and have important roles to play. Social inclusion in education refers to the inclusion in mainstream schools of children with a wide diversity of differences and needs. This has a much broader focus than inclusive education for children with SEND, but is often used by proponents of full inclusion as if it meant the same thing. In addition, many supporters of inclusive education speak of it as a process that involves whole-school re-organisation in order to develop inclusive schools. Implicit in this process, however, is the eventual goal of full inclusion (Slee, 2011).

Therefore, since the word inclusion is used in so many different ways, it is important, in order to avoid confusion, to be clear about what is meant by each specific use of the term. In this article the term ‘inclusive education’ is defined as focusing on the inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream schools.

The definition of *inclusive special education* encompasses a synthesis of the philosophies and practices of both inclusive education and special education. It involves educating children with SEND in the most inclusive settings in which their special educational needs can be met effectively, using the most effective instructional strategies, with the overarching goal of facilitating the highest level of inclusion in society post-school for all young people with SEND (Kauffman & Badar, 2014a).

The definition of *inclusive special education* also encompasses a process of ongoing whole-school organisation and development in order to assist mainstream schools to effectively educate as many children with SEND as possible. This includes ensuring that special school, resource room and special class teachers assist mainstream schools in implementing effective education for children with SEND, while at the same time effectively providing for those children with higher levels of SEND who need to be educated in these special education settings.

### *Rights*

A key confusion concerns the rights of children with SEND. A typical argument put forward in favour of full inclusion is that it is a basic human right of all children to be educated alongside their mainstream peers. To segregate children for any reason is considered by many supporters of inclusion to be a denial of their human rights. However, there are two confusions here. First of all there is confusion between human rights and moral rights. Just because someone has a human right to a certain option does not mean that it is an obligation or that it is morally the right thing for them to do (Thomson, 1990). Thus, although their human rights allow children with SEND to be educated alongside their mainstream peers, for some of them this may not, morally, be the right or best option. As Warnock puts it, ‘What is a manifest good in society, and what it is my right to have . . . may not be what is best for me as a schoolchild’ (quoted in Terzi, 2010).

A second aspect of the rights confusion concerns priorities. As well as their right to be included, children also have a right to an appropriate education suited to their needs. ‘It is their right to *learn* that we must defend, not their right to learn in the same environment as everyone else’ (Warnock, quoted in Terzi, 2010). That is, the

right to an appropriate education which meets children's specific needs is more important than the right to be educated alongside their mainstream peers. Therefore, it cannot be morally right to include all children in mainstream classrooms if this means that some of them will not be able to receive the education most appropriate for their needs (Kauffman & Badar, 2014a).

Although it is clear that their human rights allow children with SEND to be educated alongside their mainstream peers, for some of them this may not be the best option. Therefore, *inclusive special education* considers that the right to an appropriate education that meets children's specific needs must be the priority. This is considered more important than the right to be educated alongside their mainstream peers, which must be taken into account, but in the final analysis must be superseded by the right to receive an appropriate education.

### *Labelling*

Inclusive education is regarded, by its proponents, as preferable to special education, because it enables avoidance of some practices that are central to special education, such as the identification of SEND and the setting up of individual education programmes (IEPs). According to supporters of inclusive education, this is because such practices can result in labelling children with SEND, thereby stigmatising them, and therefore should be avoided. There is then a dilemma, since if children *are* identified as having SEND, there is a risk of negative labelling and stigma, while if they are *not* identified, there is a risk that they will not get the teaching they require and their special needs will not be met. This confusion is referred to as the 'dilemma of difference' by Norwich (2013).

However, it is considered that this concern is the product of confused thinking as it is clear that children with SEND attract labels from other children and teachers even when they are not formally identified as having SEND. So being stigmatised is not necessarily a result of the identification or labelling but is related to the fact that having a special educational need/disability marks them out as different from other children in some way. Therefore, avoiding identifying and labelling children with SEND will not prevent them from being stigmatised, but it may prevent them from getting the education that they need (Kauffman & Badar, 2014b).

*Inclusive special education* regards the identification of SEND, and the setting up of procedures such as IEPs and transition plans, as essential components of providing effective education for children with SEND in order to facilitate their inclusion in their communities post-school. Therefore, these are key features of *inclusive special education*.

### *Peers*

Another confusion is related to the use of the term ‘peers’. One of the hallmarks of inclusive education is that children with SEND are educated alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms. However, as Warnock points out, ‘Inclusion is not a matter of where you are geographically, but where you feel you belong’ (quoted in Terzi, 2010). Children in general are more comfortable with peers who have similar interests to themselves, so for many children with SEND it may be more important to be with peers with shared interests and similar abilities or disabilities to themselves, than peers of the same chronological age. So for these children being educated ‘alongside their peers’ means being with other children who have similar SEND. Also, being in close proximity to typically developing peers does not necessarily result in meaningful interactions (Kauffman & Badar, 2014a). Therefore, for some children with SEND, a sense of belonging and being included in a learning community is more likely to result from placement in a resource room, special class or special school than a mainstream classroom.

*Inclusive special education* acknowledges that many children with more severe SEND are more comfortable with peers who have similar interests, difficulties, abilities and disabilities to themselves, so this must be taken into account when considering educational placements. In this way a sense of belonging and being included in a learning community is emphasised, whether children with SEND are educated in special classes, resource rooms, special schools or mainstream classrooms.

### *Aetiology*

An important confusion related to inclusive education concerns theories about the aetiology of special educational needs and disabilities. Until around four decades ago it was assumed that SEND resulted entirely from physiological or psychological difficulties inherent in children themselves. Since this time awareness has grown concerning just how much social and environmental factors can influence children’s development and functioning. However, some supporters of inclusive education have taken this social perspective to its extreme and have suggested that SEND is entirely socially constructed. Both Warnock and Norwich (cited in Terzi, 2010) consider that it is going too far to deny the impact that impairments can have on children’s learning. They consider it important to acknowledge the role of physiological and psychological factors as well as social factors in the aetiology of SEND (Kauffman & Badar, 2014b).

*Inclusive special education* acknowledges the role of physiological, psychological, environmental and social factors in the aetiology of SEND. A psycho-social

model involving an ecological view of the aetiology of SEND and of the interventions needed to address these is an essential component of *inclusive special education*.

### *Intervention models*

Inclusive education is also regarded, by its proponents, as being preferable to special education because it is suggested that the latter is based on a medical or deficit model of intervention, as opposed to focusing on students' needs and strengths. This is a confused and inaccurate view, for several reasons. Special education interventions have been influenced by medical, psychological and several other treatment models, as clarified by Farrell (2010), who concludes, 'The knowledge base of special education includes a wide range of disciplines and contributions supplemented by related research and methods informing evidence-based practice'.

*Inclusive special education* promotes the use of special education interventions that focus on children's strengths as well as their needs and that have been influenced by a range of medical, psychological and other treatment models. A focus on evidence-based practice is a central feature of *inclusive special education*. This involves the selection and implementation of interventions whose effectiveness is supported by strong bases of research evidence (Hornby et al., 2013).

### *Goals*

An important confusion that impacts on the issue of inclusive education concerns the goals of education, as noted by Terzi (2010). This issue is particularly important for children with SEND. In many countries, in recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on academic achievement as the most important goal of education. Governments in many countries have focused their attention on the improvement of academic standards, especially in literacy and numeracy, by various means, including the establishment of national curricula and national assessment regimes. This has deflected attention away from the broader goals of education, such as those concerned with the development of life skills, social skills, communication skills and independent living skills.

Including children with SEND in mainstream schools that are driven by the need to achieve high academic standards results in the goals of education for many of these children being inappropriate. The major goal of education for children with

SEND must be to facilitate independence, a sense of well-being and active participation in the communities in which they live. As stated in the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10):

‘Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide them with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life.’

Clarity about the goals of education is a key part of *inclusive special education* which therefore focuses on the broader goals of education, such as those concerned with the development of life skills, vocational skills and social skills, in addition to academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. The major goal of education for children with SEND, as with all children, is to produce happy and productive citizens who are included in their communities as much as possible and have the skills needed to meet the demands of adult life.

### *Curricula*

Another issue has been the confusion surrounding entitlement and the appropriateness of curricula for children with SEND. From the time when a national curriculum was first implemented in England, influential organisations in the SEND field supported the Government’s intention to include children with SEND in this curriculum to the greatest extent possible. That all children with SEND should be entitled to have access to the same curriculum as other children was seen as being a step forward. This was in fact the case for many children with SEND, for example, those with severe visual impairment who, in the past, may have been denied opportunities such as studying science subjects. However, for the majority of children with SEND, who have various degrees of learning difficulties, it is considered to have been a backward step (Terzi, 2010).

National curricula, with their associated national assessments and their consequences, such as league tables of schools, have emphasised academic achievement much more than other aspects of the curriculum such as personal, social and vocational education. Having a national curriculum as the whole curriculum throughout all of their schooling is not appropriate for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties, as it denies them the opportunity to focus on curricula that better suit their needs and leads to many of them struggling to keep up, and as a result becoming disaffected with school.

Inclusion in an unsuitable curriculum for many children directly contributes to the development of emotional or behavioural difficulties, or exacerbates existing problems, which leads them to be disruptive and eventually results in the exclusion of some of them from schools. As argued by Farrell (2010), the priority for children with SEND must be that they have access to curricula which are appropriate for them, not that they are fitted into a national curriculum which was designed for the mainstream population.

*Inclusive special education* considers that the priority for children with SEND must be that they have access to curricula that are appropriate for them throughout their education. An important issue in *inclusive special education* is to achieve the right balance for each child with SEND between an academic or developmental curriculum, which is focused on the needs of the majority of children, and a functional curriculum which addresses the specific educational needs of children with SEND.

### *Reality*

A common confusion occurs among educators influenced by the rhetoric of full inclusion, despite its contrast with the reality of the situation in schools. The rhetoric of full inclusion suggests that it is possible to effectively educate all children with SEND in mainstream classrooms. However, the reality of the situation in mainstream schools is that many teachers do not feel able or willing to implement this scenario. The reality is that, in many countries, there is insufficient input on teaching children with SEND in initial teacher education courses and limited in-service training on SEND that is available to teachers. This means that many teachers do not have the relevant attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for including children with a wide range of SEND in their classes and are also concerned that there will be insufficient material and human resources, and in particular support staff, to effectively implement a policy of full inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000; Emam & Farrell, 2009).

*Inclusive special education* acknowledges the current reality in mainstream schools, that many teachers do not feel competent to teach children with SEND because of insufficient input on teaching children with SEND in their training and inadequate resources. Therefore a key component of *inclusive special education* is the provision of effective and ongoing training and support for mainstream class teachers. With increased levels of training and support, a greater proportion of mainstream classroom teachers will become more confident and competent to teach children with a wide range of SEND.

### *Finance*

A key confusion concerns the funding of children with SEND in general and those who are included in mainstream schools in particular. A variety of solutions to the issue of funding have been proposed, but there is still no agreement on what is the most satisfactory funding model (Terzi, 2010). There is also confusion about the relative cost of provision for SEND in mainstream or special facilities. At first sight special schools, special classes and resource rooms appear more expensive, so inclusive education seems to be the cheaper option. But if the cost of providing support services such as physical, occupational and speech/language therapy, as well as psychological, health and social welfare services to children with SEND in several mainstream schools rather than one special school location is factored in, there may be little difference.

A key issue is that, even if mainstream provision seems less expensive in the short term, it may not be in the longer term. That is, if the education system does not provide young people with SEND with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to achieve independence and success after they leave school, the cost to society will be far greater in the long term in terms of unemployment benefits, welfare payments and the costs of the criminal justice system. Thus, special provision for a small number of children with SEND may be more costly in the short term but it is likely to be much less so than the later consequences of not making suitable provision. This has been illustrated by numerous studies of the cost-effectiveness of early intervention with children (for example, Currie, 2001; Temple & Reynolds, 2007).

The focus of *inclusive special education* is to provide young people who have SEND with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to achieve as much independence and success as possible after they leave school. Therefore, the focus is on providing funding to ensure that all children with SEND, whatever the type or severity of that SEND, have educational provision that is funded sufficiently to ensure their optimal development, whether this is provided in mainstream classrooms or in special schools, special classes or resource rooms.

### *Means and ends*

An important confusion with inclusive education is whether inclusion is in actuality a means to an end or an end in itself. Proponents of full inclusion argue that segregated SEND placement is wrong because a key goal of education should be to include children fully in the community in which they live. Therefore, they ought to be included in their local mainstream schools throughout their schooling. However, as suggested by Warnock (cited in Terzi, 2010), inclusion in

the community after leaving school is actually the most important end that educators should be seeking. Inclusion in mainstream schools may be a means to that end but should not be an end in itself. For some children with SEND, segregated placement may be the best means to the end of inclusion in the community when they leave school. In contrast, inclusion in mainstream schools which does not fully meet children's special needs may be counterproductive in that it is likely to reduce their potential for full inclusion in the community as adults.

*Inclusive special education* recognises that inclusion in the community after leaving school is the most important end that educators should be seeking. Whereas inclusion in mainstream school classrooms will lead to this end for some children with SEND, for others placement in resource rooms, special classes or special schools may be the best means to the end of inclusion in the community when they leave school.

#### *Research evidence*

There is confusion about the research base for inclusive education, with many supporters of inclusive education appearing to believe that an adequate research base for inclusion is unnecessary or that it already exists. Perhaps this is not surprising since Heward (2003, p. 199) considers that:

‘Convention, convenience, dogma, folklore, fashion, and fad – more so than the results of scientific research – have all influenced theory and practice in education over the years.’

Lindsay (2007) considers that reviews of the research evidence in support of inclusion have so far been inconclusive, suggesting that an adequate research base for inclusive education has not been established. This finding is supported by more recent reviews, such as that by Kauffman et al. (2011). In addition, Farrell (2010) cites a raft of relevant studies, many of which report negative findings regarding the impact of inclusive education. Norwich concludes that there needs to be more intensive research to provide evidence regarding the policy and practice of inclusive education (cited in Terzi, 2010). Such research needs to take a long-term view of outcomes for children with SEND who experience either inclusive education or segregated schooling.

*Inclusive special education* supports the need for intensive research to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of policy and practice in *inclusive special education*. Such research needs to focus on evaluating the effectiveness of

interventions, programmes and educational placements. Research also needs to be conducted on post-school and long-term follow-ups of outcomes for children with SEND who experience either mainstream or special schooling or some combination of both during their time at school.

### **Developing a comprehensive system of inclusive special education**

In order to address the confusions highlighted above, a new theory has been proposed that synthesises theory and research from both special education and inclusive education in order to present a model for providing effective education for all children with SEND. The theory of *inclusive special education* comprises a synthesis of the philosophy and values of inclusive education along with the strategies and interventions used in special education. The theory of *inclusive special education* provides guidelines for policies, procedures and evidence-based teaching strategies that will support the delivery of effective education for all children with SEND. The goal of this new approach is to ensure that all children with SEND are effectively educated in special or mainstream facilities, wherever is most appropriate, from early childhood through secondary school education. Thus, the model combines key aspects of special education and inclusive education to form *inclusive special education*.

*Inclusive special education* is about providing the best possible instruction for all children with SEND, in the most appropriate setting, throughout all stages of a child's education, with the aim of achieving the highest possible level of inclusion in the community post-school. Its focus is on effectively including as many children as possible in mainstream schools, along with the availability of a continuum of placement options from mainstream classes to special schools, and involving close collaboration between mainstream and special schools. These elements of *inclusive special education* are summarised below.

#### *Implementing effective practices from special education and inclusive education*

*Inclusive special education* involves implementing practices that have established solid research evidence bases for supporting effective special education (Mitchell, 2014) and inclusive education (Salend & Whittaker, 2012) and therefore focuses on fostering acceptance of diversity of abilities and the use of strengths-based approaches. Assessment strategies and IEPs are used to focus on students' strengths and inform teaching. Well-established systems, including Response to Intervention (Burns & Gibbons, 2008), Universal Design for Learning (King-Sears, 2009) and Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (Savage et al., 2011), are used to manage behaviour and facilitate learning. Interventions

involving assistive and instructional technologies, peer tutoring, co-operative learning and the teaching of meta-cognitive strategies are used to optimise the effectiveness of teaching, as are collaborating closely with parents and other professionals (Hornby, 2011) and using culturally relevant and responsive interventions (Habib et al., 2013). As Heward (2003, p. 201) has suggested:

‘The biggest reason we do not teach more children with disabilities better than we do is not because we do not know enough but because we do not teach them as well as we know how . . . The same attitudes of science that helped us discover effective teaching practices can help us learn how to improve the application of those practices in schools.’

Facilitating the effective implementation of evidence-based practices (Hornby et al., 2013) is therefore a key element of *inclusive special education*.

#### *Continuum of placement options from mainstream classes to special schools*

*Inclusive special education* recognises that, although the majority of children with SEND can be effectively educated in mainstream classes, there are a minority of children with higher levels of SEND who benefit more from being educated in resource rooms, special classes or special schools for some or all of the time at school (Kauffman & Badar, 2014a; NCSE, 2010; Warnock, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary that a continuum of placement options, from mainstream classes to special schools, is available. Such continua of options, often referred to as cascades of services (Deno, 1970), have been the reality of special education provision in most countries for many years and typically include options from mainstream classrooms with support from specialist teachers or teaching assistants, through resource rooms or special classes within mainstream schools, to separate special schools. A typical continuum includes the options below:

- mainstream class with differentiation of work by the class teacher;
- mainstream class with guidance for the teacher provided by a specialist teacher;
- mainstream class with support for the pupil from a teaching assistant;
- mainstream class with some time spent in a resource room;
- special class within a mainstream school;
- special class that is part of a special school but is attached to a mainstream school;
- special school which is on same campus as a mainstream school;
- special school on a separate campus;
- residential special school on its own campus.

*Education in the most appropriate setting, through all stages of a child's education*

An important consequence of having a continuum of placement options from mainstream classes to special schools is that there can be movement between the various placements in order to ensure that an education in the most appropriate setting can be provided throughout all stages of a child's schooling. Children must be able to move between placement options when this is needed in order to make sure that they have appropriate programmes throughout their time in education. For example, it is possible that a child may begin his or her education in an early intervention programme along with other children with high levels of SEND and when school-age is reached transfer to a mainstream primary school class, perhaps with support from a specialist support teacher or teaching assistant. Later, the child may transfer to a resource room or special class within a middle school and later still transfer to a special school in order to complete his or her education. Alternatively, a child may spend time attending a special school and later be transferred to a resource room or special class within a mainstream school or to a mainstream classroom with specialist support. The most important issue is to have the flexibility to transfer within a school system that has a continuum of placement options available, in order to ensure that children are at all times being educated in the setting that best facilitates their learning.

*Organisation for providing optimal education for all children with SEND*

It is necessary to have coherent education policies and procedures in place in all aspects of the education system in order to provide the best possible education for all children with SEND (EADSNE, 2009). There are five key aspects of this.

First, there needs to be a clear and coherent national policy based on *inclusive special education* backed up by legislation that clearly specifies the rights of children with SEND and their families, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) in the USA. There also need to be statutory guidelines provided by the national ministry of education, or equivalent, in each country, such as the Code of Practice for SEND (DfE/DoH, 2014) in England. Mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that these are implemented at regional and local levels, for example, through regular school inspections conducted by agencies such as Ofsted (2014) in England. In addition, there need to be parent partnership services, as in England, or parent involvement co-ordinators, as in the USA, which can provide information and guidance to parents of children with SEND (Hornby, 2014).

Second, schools need to have policies and practices in place to ensure that the requirements of national legislation and statutory guidelines are implemented. They must have procedures in place for identifying and assessing children with SEND and for providing appropriate interventions, for example, by means of individualised educational programmes and transition plans (see Hornby, 2014). They also need to have procedures in place for monitoring and reviewing the progress of children identified as having SEND and for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions used with them.

Third, schools also need to have effective organisational procedures for meeting children's SEND (Ekins, 2012). These should be implemented by key members of special education teams or SENCOs, who are trained in *inclusive special education*, and who are part of the school staff, as well as specialists such as psychologists and specialist teachers from outside the school.

Fourth, schools must ensure that school-wide practices are based on research evidence of effectiveness in facilitating the academic and social development of children with SEND (Hornby et al., 2013). For example, they must have in place effective procedures for optimising parental involvement in their children's education (Hornby, 2011). Schools must at the same time ensure that strategies found to be ineffective, such as between-class ability grouping and facilitated communication (Hornby et al., 1997; Hornby & Witte, 2014; Kauffman & Badar, 2014b), are avoided.

Fifth, all teachers must be able to identify children with SEND and ensure that the teaching strategies and techniques that they use are based on sound practical guidelines (see Hornby, 2014). Teachers must also, whenever possible, use evidence-based practices such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring to facilitate the optimal learning of all children, including those with SEND. In order for this to become a reality, all teachers must have thorough training in teaching children with SEND as part of their initial training, and ongoing professional development relevant to this throughout their careers.

*Focus on effectively including as many children as possible in mainstream schools*

In *inclusive special education*, there is a major focus on effectively educating as many children as possible in mainstream schools. In order to achieve this, it is essential for mainstream school teachers to have a sound knowledge of the different types of SEND and the practical teaching strategies needed to teach them effectively in mainstream classrooms. Education systems and schools need to

have in place policies and practices in all of the aspects of schools discussed in this article. This is illustrated by consideration of the factors found to be essential in studies of mainstream schools that have successfully included children with SEND in the USA (McLeskey et al., 2014) and in England (Farrell et al., 2007). These were: having high expectations and focusing on meeting the needs of all students at the school; using collaboration and differentiation to provide high quality instruction for all students; having high quality ongoing school-centred professional development; ensuring efficient and flexible use of resources; utilising distributed leadership and shared decision making; and using comprehensive data systems to monitor student progress. In addition, mainstream school teachers must develop the skills necessary to work effectively with parents of children with SEND and with other professionals, such as psychologists, therapists, social workers and specialist teachers, in order to implement effective *inclusive special education*.

#### *Close collaboration between mainstream and special schools and classes*

In *inclusive special education* there are two roles for special schools. First, they provide special education for children who have more severe levels of SEND whose needs cannot be met effectively in mainstream schools. Second, they provide guidance and support to assist mainstream schools to effectively educate children with more moderate levels of SEND (Ekins, 2012). Special schools are well placed to fulfil this second aspect of their role because they have specialist staff who have expertise in dealing with the higher levels of SEND that mainstream schools typically do not have. The collaboration between special and mainstream schools is a key factor in ensuring the effectiveness of education for children with SEND in mainstream schools and is an important element of the philosophy and practice of *inclusive special education*. Therefore, emphasis is placed on teachers developing the inter-personal skills necessary for effective consultation and collaboration, including counselling and assertiveness skills, as well as the skills needed for mentoring, empowering and facilitating the development of colleagues and parents of children with SEND (Hornby, 2014).

#### **Conclusion**

A theory of *inclusive special education* has been proposed that encompasses the philosophies, policies and practices of both special education and inclusive education. In this theory, aspects of both approaches are combined to form *inclusive special education*. The goal of *inclusive special education* is to ensure that all children with SEND are effectively educated in either special or mainstream

facilities from early childhood through secondary school education, in order to achieve their maximum inclusion and full participation in the community when they leave school.

It is intended that this presentation of a theory of *inclusive special education* will help to generate a new vision which combines key aspects of inclusive education and special education in order to ensure that all children with SEND receive the best possible education and thereby obtain optimal preparation for living successful and fulfilled lives after they leave school. It is hoped that this article will spark a debate that will lead to further development of the theory of *inclusive special education*.

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