

Broadening Perspectives to Challenge Current Threats to Inclusion

Successive international agreements focused upon creating education systems that are more equitable and that challenge issues of marginalization (UNESCO 1994; 2015, United Nations 2006), have encouraged national governments to produce legislation for the development of inclusive schools (Hardy and Woodcock 2015). There can be little doubt that these initiatives have been well intentioned and indicate recognition of past injustices toward individuals and whole communities who have faced discrimination in the past, and in some instances continue to be pushed to the margins. However, legislation can have an impact only when it is followed by action to ensure that those professionals charged with responsibility for its implementation are trained, supported, and have the resources to make progress.

It is evident that progress toward the development of more inclusive schools has been made (Carrington 2025), and equally clear that this progress has been slow and, in some instances, may have stalled (Allen 2023). Indeed, there are some indications that countries that have formerly been at the forefront of developments in inclusive education may currently be lessening their commitment to ensuring equal opportunities and appropriate access. There must surely be cause for concern when some of the world's previously strongest democracies are expunging the term diversity, equity and inclusion from official documentation (US Department of Education Press Release January 2025). A situation is emerging in which those most vulnerable members of society are expressing anxieties about potential exclusion from services and a state of regression, which may undo much of the work conducted by individuals and organizations long committed to the development of a more just society.

The situation for both those who are vulnerable and the professionals who have sought to support them has changed. It is no longer safe to assume that efforts to promote inclusion will be interpreted in positive terms, or that initiatives to eliminate discrimination will be viewed favourably (Armour 2025). If the progress toward inclusion is to be safeguarded, this may require a radical change in the ways in which professionals, marginalized individuals, and others work together. This will be achieved only when a more holistic view of the causes of exclusion is taken and a commitment to new partnerships is established.

The route toward inclusive education has often been founded upon ideas and initiatives that had their roots firmly embedded in special education. In many countries, the development of educational provision for children with disabilities led to the formation of special schools and the training of teachers with

skills, knowledge, and understanding aimed at the education of children who were categorized as having special educational needs. Several of the leading activists and researchers working for an understanding of how inclusion might work have come from this special education background. This has had some advantages in respect of their long-term commitment to children with disabilities and special educational needs and their understanding of how schools work. It has also perhaps been a limiting factor, having established a narrow focus, which at times has failed to take account of those interrelated issues that lead to exclusion. A disjointed approach to confronting the challenges of exclusion has resulted in many special interest groups all seeking resources from similar limited sources, and missed opportunities for effective collaboration.

There are many conditions that can be seen as the causes of exclusion. These include poverty, gender, caste, class, religion, disability, and culture. Each area has attracted committed activists and researchers who have sought to understand the impact of their area of interest, and have worked toward a more respectful and equitable education system that acknowledges and addresses specific needs. We should never denigrate the efforts of individuals and organizations who have worked in this manner; however, we might consider how a more efficient way of collaborative working could have a greater impact. Many of these exclusionary factors are interrelated. For example, families living in poverty, with limited access to good health care, diet, housing, and social welfare, are more likely to have a child with disability. Conversely, families who have a child with disability are more likely to fall into poverty. Similarly, there is evidence to suggest that the intersection between caste and disability results in aggravated forms of discrimination (Kothari., Shaikh, and Agrawal, 2020), and that gender bias leads to the exclusion of girls, including those with disabilities, from schools (Khan *et al.* 2017).

We are currently in a situation where schools and allied professionals who may be working towards the inclusion of children with disabilities may be competing with others working for refugees, tribal communities or those living in poverty when seeking resources. Similarly, we train teachers to teach children with special educational needs and disabilities, while often ignoring the pedagogical aspects of working with children from other cultures and in the second or third language or those living in poverty. This way of working has had an impact on the progress that has to date been made in making schools more inclusive.

Although not a complete solution, it is surely time that professionals engaged in the training of teachers,

the development of teaching resources, or conducting research looked beyond the narrow confines that have conventionally defined our focus and roles. If we are to address the increasing challenges that are confronting the promotion of respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion, we need an agenda based on shared principles and action. This may best begin with increased collaboration between professionals who work in the interest of different groups who are currently struggling to gain access to learning alongside their peers. It should be accompanied by research to provide increased understanding of the relationship between different exclusionary factors, and by developing a collective voice through a more coordinated approach to ensuring that the voices of all who suffer discrimination within education systems are heard.

Financial support and sponsorship
Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Richard Rose

Department of Inclusive Education, University of Northampton, UK

Address for correspondence: Prof. Richard Rose,
Department of Inclusive Education, University of Northampton, UK.
E-mail: richard.rose@northampton.ac.uk

FURTHER READING

1. Allan J. Inclusion: how far have we come and how far can we go? *Educ Inq* 2023; p. 1-14. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2023.2264059>. [Last accessed on 2025 May 12].
2. Armour S. Trump’s DEI Undoing Undermines Hard-Won Accommodations for Disabled People. *TKFF Health News* (April 3rd). Trump’s DEI Undoing Undermines Hard-Won Accommodations for Disabled People – *KFF Health News*; 2025. [Last accessed on 2025 May 12].
3. Carrington S. Looking back, looking forward. In Banks J, editor. *Conversations and Debates on Inclusive and Special Education*. London:

- Routledge; 2025.
4. Hardy I, Woodcock S. Inclusive education policies: Discourses of difference, diversity and deficit. *Int J Inclusive Educ* 2015;19:141-64.
5. Khan HU, Khan A, Zaman K, Nabi AA, Hishan SS, Islam T. Gender discrimination in education, health, and labour market: A voice for equality. *Qual Quant* 2017;51:2245-66.
6. Kothari J, Shaikh A, Agrawal A. *The Intersection of Disability and Caste* (CLPR, Bangalore, 2020, 20 Jul 2020). Available from: https://clpr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Caste-Disability_CLPR-Web-Pages.pdf. [Last accessed on 2025 May 12].
7. UNESCO. *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Educational Needs*. Paris: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation; 1994.
8. United Nations. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York: United Nations; 2006.
9. UNESCO. *SDG4-Education 2030, Incheon Declaration (ID) and Framework for Action. For the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*. Paris: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation; 2015.
10. US Department of Education Press Release (January 2025) U.S. Department of Education Takes Action to Eliminate DEI. U.S. Department of Education Takes Action to Eliminate DEI | U.S. Department of Education. [Last accessed on 2025 May 12].

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code: 	Website: https://journals.lww.com/jiad
	DOI: 10.4103/JIAD.JIAD_18_25

How to cite this article: Rose R. Broadening perspectives to challenge current threats to inclusion. *J Incl Able Disabl People Res Neuro Rehabil Empowerment* 2025;1:41-2.

Received: 15-05-2025	Revised: 15-05-2025
Accepted: 15-05-2025	Published: 30-06-2025