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The Education for All and inclusive education debate: conflict, contradiction or opportunity?

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This paper begins with an exploration of the history of the international Education for All (EFA) programme and its tendency to overlook some marginalised groups of children, in particular those seen as having 'special educational needs' or impairments and disabilities. The exclusion from 'mainstream' education programmes of the estimated, though unreliable, figures of 90 or 98% of children in Southern countries has, until relatively recently, been largely unchallenged. The explanation lies in the still prevalent view that some children are 'ineducable' and that overcrowded and under-resourced schools would not be able to cope. Consequently, a largely parallel, international debate has developed about 'inclusive education', within which many conflicting positions exist. We suggest that there is an unhelpful and wasteful polarisation between EFA and inclusive education. Although inclusive education is defined by some writers in terms of overcoming barriers to learning and development for all children, in the context of Southern countries it tends to fill the gap left by EFA and so focuses almost exclusively on disabled children. This paper challenges some of the rhetoric, but also highlights the opportunities created by the current international interest in, and apparent commitment to, delivering quality education for all children. The paper concludes by offering a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between EFA and inclusive education, argues for greater collaboration and synergy between these currently parallel initiatives, and suggests ways in which practitioners and policy makers can develop more sustainable, and context-appropriate, policies and practices.

Keywords: Education for All (EFA); inclusive education; disability

Introduction

The primary aim of this paper is to explore the two interrelated, yet often parallel, international agendas of Education for All (EFA) and inclusive education. We highlight the tendency of EFA programmes to overlook some marginalised groups of children, in particular those seen as having 'special educational needs' or disabilities.[1] Although much of the rhetoric of inclusive education is about 'overcoming barriers to learning and development' for all children (Booth and Ainscow 2002) and therefore in tune with EFA, some disability-focused international organisations have chosen to champion the rights of particular groups of disabled children rather than to engage with the need to improve teaching and learning environments for all children. Increasingly, though, efforts are being made by international organisations to bridge the gap which has existed between their general focus on development and the work of specialist agencies.

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Our concern here is to draw attention to some of the inherent conflicts and contradictions of the current international discussions on EFA and inclusive education, respectively. We do not want to polarise the debate further, but aim to challenge some of the rhetoric, and highlight the opportunities that both EFA and inclusive education provide in fulfilling the international commitments to deliver quality education for all children. We argue here that opportunities currently exist internationally to align inclusive education and EFA more closely in the interests of developing more coherent and sustainable responses to the educational needs of marginalised groups of children. However, we also caution that attention needs to be paid to the cultural and contextual appropriateness of educational programmes which address social and educational inequities.

Our expertise and knowledge of educational developments are firmly rooted in the English-speaking countries of Africa and India, respectively. We are conscious that we have not been able to cite examples of practice from South or Central America, although we know that such examples exist. This is partly due to the additional language barriers facing practitioners in South and Central America in documenting and disseminating their experience, and partly due to the lack of our own professional contacts in those countries. We also know that the Enabling Education Network (EENET), which promotes the sharing of information on inclusive education and prioritises the information needs of the income-poor countries of the South (Miles 2002), has relatively few links with practitioners in this part of the world (Little and Waljee 2006).

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The dilemma

Before we explore some of the current thinking behind EFA and inclusive education, we present three scenarios which help to illuminate the history, and continued dominance, of 'separate thinking' about disability. In some countries responsibility for disabled children does not lie with the Ministry of Education, but in Health or Social Welfare, because of the attitude that some children are 'ineducable' (Booth and Ainscow 1998). By implication, therefore, disabled children are not always considered to be part of humanity. Indeed, it was only 35 years ago that responsibility for the education of all children, including those with intellectual impairments, was taken over by the UK equivalent of the Ministry of Education (Mittler 2002). It is hardly surprising that the EFA movement and many large international non-governmental organisations have been influenced by this way of thinking and so tend to treat this group of children separately.

> A large international charity, based in Western Europe, supports orphans and abandoned children in over 100 countries. It provides institutional care of a very high standard, but its admissions policy denies access to orphans who have physical, sensory or intellectual impairments.

> In Romania special schools were found to be largely populated by Roma children who had struggled to cope in mainstream schools and were perceived to have 'special educational needs', largely associated with language, culture and prejudice. Yet children with severe disabilities remained at home, not considered to be able to attend school. (Ainscow 1999)

> In the slum communities of Bombay, India, UNICEF introduced an innovative pre-school programme. All children were welcomed to join these new pre-schools, except those who were perceived to have disabilities. (Alur, cited in Booth and Ainscow 1998)

These are recent examples of exclusionary thinking in three very different contexts: a 'developed' country in Western Europe; a country which is in political transition, and a southern country with a rapidly growing economy. They reflect a history of separate thinking which separates disabled orphans from non-disabled orphans, Roma children from non-Roma children who have severe impairments, and poor children living in slum communities from other poor children who happen to be disabled.

Given this history of socially constructing children into separate groupings, we will now explore the concept of Education for All, highlight some of the inherent contradictions, and identify some of the opportunities presented by this global effort to provide equal access to education for all children.

The narrowing of the Education for All agenda

EFA represents an international commitment to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education of good quality. This commitment is based both on a human rights perspective, and on the generally held belief that education is central to individual well-being and national development, as the following quote from the UK Department for International Development (Department for International Development/HM Treasury 2006) illustrates:

> Education benefits not just children, but families and communities, and whole countries. It improves job chances and prosperity; promotes health and prevents disease. (Foreword)

Education, it is argued, enables people to live with dignity, develop their full capacities, participate fully in development and improve the quality of their lives (UNESCO 1990). It also has a role to play in promoting 'the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice' (UNESCO 1996, ii). Yet, it also has the potential to be used as a vehicle in the reinforcement of authoritarian, discriminatory and anti-democratic practices in society. The role of teachers in the Rwandan genocide is a particularly stark example of this (Harber 2002). A less dramatic, but equally disturbing, example is the influence of 'gender violence' perpetrated by male pupils and teachers in schools in Zimbabwe and Uganda, which socialises girls into accepting male violence in society and by governments (Leach 2003). Tomasevski (2003) provides further examples of the abuse of education and its prejudiced and anti-human rights policies and practices. Yet education has played a role in national reconstruction. It has helped in the elimination of child labour in some countries (Tomasevski 2003) and Oxfam (2004) claims that young people who have completed primary education are less likely to contract HIV than those who have not been to school.

International efforts to promote EFA intensified following the 1st World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. This conference was particularly significant because it acknowledged that large numbers of vulnerable and marginalised groups of learners were excluded from education systems worldwide. It also presented a vision of education as a much broader concept than schooling, beginning with early childhood, emphasising women's literacy and recognising the importance of basic literacy skills as part of lifelong learning. This was a landmark conference in the development of thinking about inclusive education (even though the concept of inclusive education was not used at this juncture).

Progress towards achieving EFA was reviewed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 and the following key challenge was identified:

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> to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies. Education for All … must take account of the need of the poor and the most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people and adults affected by conflict, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poor health; and those with special learning needs …. (UNESCO 2000, expanded commentary on the Dakar Framework for Action, para. 19)

The broad vision of EFA lives on in the six EFA goals which are now articulated as follows: to expand early childhood care and education; provide free and compulsory primary education for all; promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; increase adult literacy by 50%; achieve gender equality by 2015; and improve the quality of education (UNESCO 2000).

The commitment to EFA was reiterated in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) developed by the international community (United Nations 2000). The MDGs are seen as part of a broader commitment towards building a better world in the 21st century by eliminating global poverty, promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. The importance of education as a strategy in poverty reduction is made explicit in these international targets which seek to end the vicious cycle of exclusion from education leading to chronic poverty and further social exclusion.

It is therefore a matter of great concern that the international EFA agenda has become increasingly focused on the second MDG, 'ensuring that all boys and girls *complete* a full course of primary schooling by 2015' or Universal Primary Education (UPE). The rhetoric of educating *all* has gradually been reduced to a narrow focus on five years of compulsory schooling. An interesting example of this reduction of the EFA agenda is evident in the Indian context. The Constitution of India sets out an obligation for providing a minimum of eight years of education for all 6–14-year-old children. However the District Primary Education Programme, started in 1994 as one of the largest education programmes, sponsored primarily by the World Bank, focused on five years of schooling, from 6 to 11 years (District Primary Education Programme 2000). This significantly reduced the constitutional commitment and reinforced a belief that five years of schooling are adequate.

The Department for International Development (2000) notes strong links between levels of education and economic growth:

> in enabling poor people to develop skills, education enhances productivity and provides an essential underpinning for economic growth. … There is a close parallel between the rates of economic growth of a country and the overall level of education of its economically active population. (2)

More recently, Tilak (2003) argued that there is growing evidence that primary education is not sufficient in enabling people to break out of poverty:

> It is only when people have at least completed middle/upper primary level of education, the relationship between education and poverty becomes negative and important; and the negative relationship becomes stronger when the level of education is raised to secondary and above. (49–50)

The narrowing of the initial EFA goals to the completion of five years of primary schooling is a worrying trend in the context of developing economies. In such a

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scenario, economic growth and wider development goals are unlikely to be achieved – primary education is no longer enough.

Disability overlooked

Although the initial vision of 'EFA by the year 2000' was extremely broad and ambitious, the rhetoric of 'all' has overlooked the issue of disability and failed to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged children, especially in those countries which are unlikely to achieve the second MDG by 2015. Our concern in this paper is to highlight evidence of the continued exclusion of disabled children from the international agenda and planning, such as the failure of UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Reports to address the education (or lack of it) for disabled children. These reports do not engage in any great depth with the educational status of disabled children, yet other 'at risk' groups, such as girls, have been part of more mainstream efforts.

Although not a homogenous group, disabled children tend to be identified internationally as a group of children who are disproportionately excluded from education (Mittler 2005). It is often claimed that disabled children are among the poorest and the most disadvantaged in their communities, and that they have been systematically excluded from more 'mainstream' EFA efforts (Savolainen, Matero, and Kokkala 2006; Rieser 2005). Some have justified the need for a narrow focus on the education of children with disabilities to enable stronger advocacy at the national and international level for a group of people whose needs have largely been ignored by mainstream development programmes, such as EFA initiatives.

The EFA flagship, 'The right to education for persons with disabilities: towards inclusion' was established in 2002 as a result of such concerns (UNESCO 2004). EFA 'flagships' have been set up to champion a range of different interests and concerns within EFA; teacher education, HIV/AIDS, early childhood, for example. The aim of these flagships is to promote knowledge sharing and global partnerships. The 'disability' flagship has taken on the responsibility of ensuring that disabled learners are included in national EFA action plans. While it is argued that the creation of this flagship will help to raise awareness of the rights of disabled children to be included in EFA, there is a danger that disability could become further separated from more mainstream debates, and perceived as an issue for 'specialists'. The result could be continued exclusion and neglect of disabled people from policy and practice. By the same token, the flagship's campaign for disabled children's broader right to education (rather than inclusive education) reinforces the notion of a right to a range of provision, which includes segregated special schools – an issue which receives little attention in EFA and UPE debates, but to which we will return later.

Although the overall theme of this paper is to warn against the dangers of polarising the debate further and of categorising children, we still think it is important to highlight the fact that it was only relatively recently that disability was included in the agenda of international development agencies (as indicated by a review of the international literature undertaken by Singal 2006). It will not be possible to implement EFA or inclusive education if some children continue to be invisible or overlooked.

The invisibility of disabled children in mainstream development programmes provides specialist agencies with the justification that they need to continue to focus

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specifically on disabled children, or even only on children with a single impairment, such as blindness. Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus among some international agencies that action needs to be taken to meet the needs of the millions of out-of-school disabled children and to promote more meaningful dialogue and collaboration between specialist agencies and those concerned with broader development issues (for example, World Vision UK 2007). Save the Children UK has been promoting a more inclusive approach to disability, education and development work for the last two decades (Miles 1995; Save the Children UK 2006).

It was the perceived invisibility of the disability issue that prompted an international campaign to develop the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Disabled people's organisations and other non-governmental organisations worked on an equal basis with representatives of national governments to achieve this outcome. One of the most contentious debates was about Article 24 which focuses on education. This paper now requires all signatories to ensure that all disabled children can access an inclusive, quality, free primary and secondary education (United Nations 2006).

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A focus on statistics

A recent EFA Monitoring Report estimates that only 10% of disabled children are in school and that one-third of the 77 million (6–11-year-old) children currently out of school have a disability (UNESCO 2007). The other two-thirds are said to be children from poor families, those living in poor households, and children whose mothers have no education. International statistics relating to out of school children need to be scrutinised very carefully as definitions of this term are not comparable across national boundaries.

The absence of reliable data regarding disabled children is problematic, and largely related to the enormous challenge of standardising definitions of disability across cultures, and of collecting any form of reliable data in many countries, especially those affected by conflict. In a World Bank publication, Peters (2003, 12) asserted that '40 million of the estimated 115 million children out of school have disabilities' and that 'children with disabilities are likely to have never attended school' and 'fewer than 5% are believed to reach the goal of primary school completion'. As long as the majority of disabled children continue to be excluded from education, the second MDG and the wider goals of EFA will not be achievable in the near future (Peters 2003).

Evidence suggests that disabled people are disproportionately over-represented in the poorest of the poor (Department for International Development 2000; Yeo and Moore 2003). In a World Bank-commissioned study, Elwan (1999) estimated that disabled people may account for as many as one in five of the world's poorest, yet they remain absent from most mainstream research, policies and planning. It will be a very long time before any reliable international statistics exist. In the meantime the absence of data presents considerable challenges to organisations arguing for a greater political and resource commitment at an international level to the inclusion of disabled children in education. Yet it is well known that the majority of disabled children in Southern countries do not attend school! In the long-term these statistics will be an important step towards holding governments accountable for their actions and of ensuring that the issue is recognised and mainstreamed.

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The development of inclusive education

The Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 2004) considered the implications of the pledge made by the world community in 1990 to include disabled children and other marginalised groups of learners in education. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was signed by the 92 participating countries and some have argued that it is the most influential document in recent times in inclusive education (Ainscow 1999).

The Statement has a strong focus on the 'development of inclusive schools' in relation to the international goal of achieving education for all. The notion of *all* was expanded upon and discussed in detail:

> schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups. (UNESCO 1994, 6)

Yet the fact that the Salamanca Conference needed to take place at all is further evidence of the history of separate thinking referred to earlier. It was organised by the then Special Needs Education department in UNESCO's Paris headquarters to maximise the opportunities created by Jomtien in 1990.

Salamanca could arguably be used to legitimise the exclusive concerns of some practitioners and international agencies with disabled children and those identified as having special educational needs. Yet Salamanca has been very influential in challenging attitudes within 'special needs and inclusion' circles, but it is only in these circles that it is discussed and taken seriously – yet its focus is on *all*. A broader notion of all and a greater appreciation of difference in the education system could hold the key to improving the quality of education for all children (Ainscow 1999). We will return to this issue later.

Since Salamanca, the term 'inclusive education' has taken on multiple meanings across the globe. It is sometimes used in England to describe practices within special schools (Spurgeon 2007). In some UK contexts inclusive education is no longer associated with disability or special needs, but rather with school attendance or behaviour (Ainscow et al. 2006). Slee (2004) has argued that the idea of inclusive education is showing signs of jetlag and is increasingly used to mean many different things. He bemoans the fact that it has lost its original radical meaning, which rejected medical and psychological explanations of educational difficulties.

Ainscow et al. (2006, 15) have developed a typology of six ways of thinking about inclusion:

- Inclusion as a concern with disabled students and others categorised as 'having special educational needs'.
- Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion.
- Inclusion in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion.
- Inclusion as developing the school for all.
- Inclusion as 'Education for All'.
- Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society.

These different interpretations of inclusive education indicate that there is conceptual confusion surrounding this issue, but perhaps also that it necessarily takes different

forms, depending on contextual concerns. Essentially it is a process of challenging exclusion in schools and communities and of being 'vigilant about whatever threats to equity arise' (Dyson 2004, 615).

However, in the same way that Jomtien provided a broad framework with little guidance on implementation but failed to adequately spell out the mechanics of *how* to achieve education for all children, Salamanca has led to a divergence of views and a lack of clarity on implementation. International consensus on the issue of inclusive education, and its relationship to EFA, is perhaps less important than the development of coherent and sustainable policies at country level. The extent to which more inclusive educational practices are promoted at country level will depend on the development of a clear understanding of the concept of 'inclusive education for all' in the cultural contexts in which it is developed.

Generalised definitions developed by international agencies, such as the Salamanca Statement, may help in promoting initial discussions, but are likely to be less helpful when practitioners attempt to make sense of inclusive education. In her analysis of international policy and practice concerning inclusive education, Peters (2003, 1) concluded that it is a 'complex issue' and that 'no coherent approach is evident in the literature'. She goes on to state that not only is inclusive education implemented at different levels, but it also embraces different goals, is based on a range of varied motives, reflects different classifications of special educational needs and provides services in different contexts. Although this allows for the development of culturally and contextually appropriate understandings of inclusive education to emerge, there is a 'danger that wishful thinking about the way it is used or applied may distract people from exploring the realities of practice' (Booth and Ainscow 1998, 3). These concerns are evident in contexts, where inclusion is seen as being exclusively focused on concerns for disabled children or used as a reason for their continued segregation.

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Despite this conceptual confusion, cross-cultural learning between southern countries can help to contextualise global debates. Miles and Ahuja (2007) offer the following advice:

> it is helpful to make a distinction between 'generalisations' that attempt to determine patterns that are assumed to be relevant to any country, and 'transferability', where there is an emphasis on the importance of understanding contextual factors in shaping how ideas are interpreted. (132)

Establishing dialogue between policy makers and practitioners both within and between countries facing similar challenges can be beneficial as they work towards the common goal of providing meaningful, quality education for all children. The extent to which more inclusive educational practices are promoted at country level, however, will depend on the development of a clear understanding of the concept of 'inclusive education' in the cultural contexts in which it is being developed.

Non-formal education

The underlying principles of EFA and inclusive education are about addressing 'all', but they have differed in the way they have approached these concerns. In inclusive education there is a tension between the needs of disabled individuals on the one hand and the notions of equality and social inclusion on the other. In EFA there has been insufficient scrutiny of the two central concepts of 'education' and 'all'.

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Although the EFA Framework recognises that 'the main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling', it also states that supplementary and alternative programmes can help meet the basic learning needs of children with limited or no access to formal schooling. This is an interesting caveat which has resulted in the proliferation of multiple systems across many countries. The quality of education provided in these alternative systems is highly questionable. In India, for example, there was a significant rise in the number and spread of alternative systems. Non-formal education (NFE) and the National Institute of Open Schooling are two such examples of systems which have been criticised as offering poor, sub-quality education (Taneja 2001; Nambissan 2000; Dreze and Sen 1995; Juneja 1997; Shukla 1986). An evaluation of the NFE programme in nine states covering 114,000 centres highlighted the fact that 12% of the children dropped out before completion of the course, and 42% of these left during the first nine months. It also revealed the low quality of instructors, who had been poorly trained for periods lasting from a week to a month. Thus NFE has been accused of dilution of learning achievement, while its characteristics of flexibility, localisation and need specific strategy have often been used as loopholes for offering sub-quality education. Similarly, popular perceptions of open learning suggest that it is an 'easy access to degrees' (Mukhopadhyay and Parhar 1999). These alternative systems were intended to be developed as a temporary stop-gap or a last resort (Berntsen 1995), yet they have become recognised parallel systems of education. Children who are regarded as 'weak' academically tend to be pushed out of the mainstream system into schools run by the National Institute of Open Schooling (Jha 2002). Notably, in recent years special schools are also being added to this list of alternative schools in India, without any acknowledgement of the exclusionary practices and reduced life opportunities associated with this approach.

In a recent analysis of 17 EFA plans from the South and South East Asia region, Ahuja (2005) concluded that inclusive education was not even mentioned. In fact, special schools and residential hostels were put forward as a strategy for meeting the needs of a wide range of disadvantaged students, and non-formal education was seen as a solution to the educational needs of marginalised groups. This is a worrying trend especially given the negative effects of institutionalisation, especially on vulnerable groups of children in under-resourced contexts (United Nations 2005).

The disability factor

Recent studies in Southern countries have highlighted the fact that inclusive education is primarily understood as being about disabled children. Singal (2004) noted that inclusive education, though a part of the Indian government's policy rhetoric, is focused solely on providing education for disabled children. Mainstream teachers in Zambia who participated in an action research project began with the assumption that inclusive education only concerns children identified as having special needs or disabilities, and that these children are the sole responsibility of specialist teachers (Miles et al. 2003). There are considerable pressures to regard the educational concerns of disabled children as being separate from, and different to, the concerns highlighted in the broader education system. The focus then is on setting up special classrooms, special schools and/or rehabilitation centres, which still cannot accommodate the large numbers of out-of-school disabled children. Nor can this specialist approach address the large numbers of children overlooked within existing classrooms who struggle to learn and tend to fail exams and repeat whole school years at great cost to their families.

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Although very little research has been done in this area, findings emerging from Southern countries indicate that special schools tend to be unregulated and of poor quality. They are often a watered down form of schooling for the small minority of disabled children who attend them. Yet the number of special schools has doubled recently in India (Singal 2006), despite the government's commitment to inclusive education.

A study of 15 special schools was recently carried out in Uganda in order to 'develop proposals for the existing and new special schools to meet basic requirements and minimum standards' (Kristensen et al. 2006, 139). This was in response to a government report which concluded that special schools did not meet minimum standards. This study needs to be seen in the context of Uganda's progressive rights-based legislation on education, including a policy of positive discrimination in primary education towards girls, and towards disabled girls and boys since 1996 (Ndeezi 2000). Government commitment, therefore, to providing education for all children, as far as possible in an inclusive system, is considerable. Nevertheless Kristensen et al. (2006, 139) found that the quality of education and education materials in the special schools was poor, and children were often 'admitted to special schools without proper assessment of their educational needs and the resources are not available to provide them with an appropriate range of experiences'. This study highlights the lack of 'specialist' expertise and resources in so-called 'special' schools. Yet it strongly recommends that deaf children and others with 'severe' disabilities should continue to be educated in special schools – *with improved facilities* (our italics), alongside the government's commendable policy of inclusive education. The authors do not state whether it is feasible for Uganda to build and adequately equip enough special schools for all its deaf children, or for those with 'severe' disabilities. Given the economic constraints this is highly unlikely.

The development of 'units' attached to mainstream schools has the potential to reach more children and develop expertise at the local level. In a rural area of Uganda, parents and teachers are reported to have overcome prejudice and scepticism, and their lack of specialist knowledge in enabling deaf children to access education for the first time (Wilson, Miles, and Kaplan 2008). Over the last five years 'integrated schools' (units attached to primary schools) have been set up in each county of Bushenyi District to act as resource centres for schools in the surrounding area and as training sites for teachers. Despite initial resistance, teachers and parents have been helped to learn sign language by deaf adults and have seen the benefits of education for their deaf children – demonstrating that so-called 'specialist' expertise can be developed in rural communities, enabling deaf children to remain with their families. In this example community involvement in the educational initiative has helped to prevent the 'integrated school' from becoming a smaller version of a special school, which can easily happen with specialist units.

The inclusive education debate has undoubtedly helped to raise concerns about disabled children in international fora. However it has also highlighted the many dilemmas and tensions which result when disability is seen as a separate issue. Disabled children are not a homogeneous group. They may identify more strongly with other aspects of their overall identity, such as their gender, economic status, ethnicity, etc. Belonging to one or more of these groupings significantly increases their vulnerability. For instance, the range and quality of life choices available to a young disabled girl growing up in a poor family living in a village in India are different from those available to a disabled boy in the same family, and also to a disabled girl living in an Indian city. However, efforts aimed at children with disabilities do not

take account of such *inter-sectionalities* and multi-vulnerabilities. Disability should be recognised as one of many issues of difference and discrimination, rather than as an issue on its own, and broader developmental efforts should take account of the multi-dimensionality of such differences.

An inability to see disability as part of the human condition tends to mean that disabled people are overlooked. This was evident in post-tsunami relief efforts where Kett, Stubbs, and Yeo (2005, 10) observed that:

> the disability sector operated within a 'cocoon' and didn't really engage with important mainstream development issues. Networking and collaboration tended to suffer from 'vertical dominance' with poor communities remaining largely 'out of the loop'.

This resulted in the continued chasm where the needs of disabled people remained outside mainstream concerns, primarily due to their inability or reluctance to engage with mainstream efforts, and on the other hand, the inability or ignorance of main-stream efforts to incorporate disability-related needs within their work.

It is likely to be impossible to establish common ground on this issue. While many in the field argue that there needs to be a focus on 'all', there is arguably still a need for a particular focus on disability issues – sometimes called a 'twin-track' approach. This, in itself, can be problematic. Minow (1990) refers to this problem as the 'dilemma of difference' where the special treatment of difference further perpetuates disadvantages for members of oppressed groups. However if this difference is not recognised there is the likelihood of it not being addressed. Proponents of inclusive education (such as Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006) have argued that initiatives focused solely on disability tend to undermine and distract from broader efforts to promote system and organisational change, which is the central focus of inclusive education, as it was originally intended.

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Conclusion

The opportunities presented by the Education for All (EFA) movement since 1990 have been unprecedented. The emergence of education as a rights issue, the realisation that education is central to developing economies, the growing disability movement, and a deeper realisation that education is essential for global tolerance have all provided a strong impetus for change. Both the EFA and inclusive education initia-tives are evidence of this growing global concern.

Yet, the enormity of the challenge of providing universal primary education in coun-tries of the South can seem overwhelming, and the analysis presented by many inter-national agencies tends to adopt a deficit approach, with educational systems portrayed as 'struggling to cope with poorly trained teachers, inadequate budgets, large class sizes, and more recently the HIV/AIDS crisis' (Miles and Ahuja 2007, 133). From a Northern perspective, the challenge of educating all children, including those identified as having disabilities, in the context of income poor countries can seem impossible.

Education is, however, a much broader concept than the acquisition of skills. Inclusive education aims to promote democratic principles and a set of values and beliefs relating to equality and social justice so that all children can participate in teaching and learning. Through its championing of marginalised groups, inclusive education has the potential to promote such values and beliefs, and so has a great deal to offer the current EFA debate.

The 'value added' nature of inclusive education is not only in its raising of issues of quality of education and placement, but more importantly it brings to the forefront issues about social justice. Inclusive education provides an opportunity for society to examine critically its social institutions and structures. It necessarily challenges didactic, teacher-centred teaching practices, such as rote learning, and so opens up opportunities for developing better pedagogy and greater competence. EFA often fails to explore such broad issues. Inclusive education offers an opportunity for EFA to begin to make distinctions between 'moral' and 'mechanical' reforms. A commitment to providing education for all children is not about 'bums on seats', but about revisiting our conceptions about schooling and the purpose of education. It is an opportunity to engage in debates which are otherwise seen as being the prerogative of philosophers.

The coming together of EFA and inclusive education helps us to ask some fundamental questions, such as 'What is the role of education?' Is the primary task of education to develop a literate and numerate individual with economically relevant attributes as put forward in the human capital approach and in the educational policies of many governments across the globe? Or are the 'core educational values' shaped by a range of other social and human development outcomes of education that concentrate on the 'enhancement of human lives and freedoms' as argued by Sen (1999).

Emphasis has shifted in EFA from the original focus of 'access', to more recent concerns about quality and completion. However by focusing on *individual groupings*, such as disabled children, rather than examining the system as a whole, we run the risk of reinforcing existing dichotomies between access to learning opportunities (quantity) and knowledge acquisition or competence development (quality). It is only by examining these as central issues when undertaking radical reforms of education systems that we can respond to the needs and concerns of a new global era.

Radical changes are required in education systems, and in the values and principles of the people involved in delivering education, if the world's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are to gain access to their local school. Singal (2004) has argued that inclusive education is not only about addressing issues of input (for example, access), and those related to processes (for example, teacher training), rather inclusion involves a shift in underlying values and beliefs held across the system. As these values and beliefs are reflected in the policies we frame (at the national, school and classroom level) and the education systems that we build.

In summary, thinking more deeply about the concept of 'all' can enable policy makers and practitioners to explore existing opportunities within country contexts, rather than looking for technological solutions from outside these contexts. Developing local understandings of the complex concepts of 'education', 'all' and 'inclusion' is critical to the development of appropriate and sustainable policies on teaching and learning. South–South collaboration is essential in the ongoing development of innovative, and culturally and contextually appropriate education policies and practices. The eighth Millennium Development Goal is arguably the most crucial of the Millennium Development Goals as it challenges the international community to establish a global partnership to make the goals a reality, and North–South and South–South collaboration is central to the achievement of this goal.

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Note

1. As authors, we discussed the relative merits of the terms 'disabled people' and 'people with disabilities' and agreed to go with the first author's preference for disabled people, as used

in the UK. We are aware, however, that internationally the term 'people with disabilities' is becoming more commonly used. We also acknowledge that in many developing economies person first language can help to reduce the stigma associated with disability.

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