

How well do we understand social inclusion in education?

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Abstract

The paper draws on the findings of a small-scale empirical study to discuss why the project of inclusion, despite a long history of legislative efforts from the Salamanca Statement onwards, still appears to be troubling. The study used scenarios to explore tensions between inclusion and individual choice experienced by young people in the context of everyday social interaction with reference to the intersection between disability, ethnicity, gender and social class. Building on the findings, we argue that understanding inclusion at the level of social interaction has important implications for inclusive education. We employ ideas from theoretical work on inclusion to suggest that in order to achieve inclusion in education or in society, a top down approach influenced by national and international policy and a rights discourse might not be sufficient; this is because inclusion processes also operate at the level of everyday social interaction where policy has less influence. Such processes, for instance individual choice, are often less explored or even ignored by the inclusion literature, as they are seen as questioning or threatening the moral imperative of including all people. This argument, thus, raises the question of how well we understand social inclusion and provides directions for further research.

inclusion, inclusive education, homophily, social interaction, individual choice, scenarios

Introduction

This paper draws on the findings of a small-scale empirical study to discuss why the project of inclusion, despite a long history of legislative efforts from the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) onwards, still appears to be troubling. 'Inclusion' as a concept has been defined in various ways and has appeared in diverse fields including socio-cultural theory (Valenzuela, 2007), critical race studies (Vasquez *et al.*, 2012), feminist theory (Rohrer, 2005), and disability and Deaf studies (Foster *et al.*, 2003). Whilst it has come to be strongly associated with disability and special education, the discourses around 'inclusion' as a concept, theory and practice are wide reaching and interdisciplinary and can be used to explore the experiences of all children and young people and across the whole range of human diversity. Indeed, Foster *et al.* argue: 'inclusion is a culturally relative term, and that the way in which one country attempts to operationalize inclusive educational goals may be perceived as exclusionary in another country' (p. 3) Rohrer (2005) defines inclusion as:

'[...] a theory and praxis that considers disability subjectivities and knowledges in fluid relationships to all other forms of subjectivity and knowledge' (p. 35).

This understanding of inclusion as complex and situated is the starting point for this paper.

This study explored tensions between inclusion and individual choice experienced by young people in the context of everyday social interaction with reference to the intersection between disability, ethnicity, gender and social class. Building on the study's findings, we argue that understanding inclusion at the level of social interaction has important implications for inclusive education. We employ ideas from theoretical work on inclusion (e.g., Felder, 2018) to suggest that in order to achieve inclusion in education or more broadly in society, a top down approach influenced by national and international policy and a rights discourse might not be sufficient; this is because inclusion processes also operate at the level of everyday social interaction where policy has less influence. Such processes though are less explored or even ignored by the inclusion literature, as they are often seen as questioning or threatening inclusion (Slee, 2018) – this raises the question of how well we understand social inclusion. In the following sections, we discuss some literature on inclusion and then we move into the details of the study and its implications for education.

Social inclusion

The term 'inclusion' comes from the Latin verb *includo* which, as noted by Felder (2018), can express both positive ('incorporate') and negative ('entrap') meanings. It is indicative though that in the context of education inclusion is only used in a positive way to refer to belonging and participation due to its association with values such as respect and equality. Cigman (2007), for instance, discussing inclusion argues that:

'All children without exception should be treated with respect. People may disagree about what it means to show or withhold respect, but that all human beings are entitled to unconditional respect is the basic concern driving this debate' (p. 784).

Cigman argues though that the difficulty in recognising inclusion as being about respect is that people can understand and interpret respect differently. Koutsouris (2014a; 2014b), e.g., found that young people hold different interpretations of respect in the context of social interaction as being both about ensuring participation for all and acknowledging individual preferences. This is part of a broader issue about how the values associated with inclusion can lead to significant tensions impacting on inclusive education (Norwich, 2013; Norwich and Koutsouris, 2017). A tension that can be seen as particularly relevant to this paper is one between autonomy (individuality) and control (commonality), in that exercising autonomy (e.g. individual preference) can come into tension with the pursuit of goods of broader social significance (e.g. social inclusion). The question is whether such tensions ought to be resolved once and for all in order to achieve inclusion, a matter that has been debated in the literature. Dworkin (2001) for example argues that an ultimate resolution of all tensions is possible as 'the direction of our thought is towards unity, not fragmentation' (2001, p. 199). By contrast, Minow and Singer (2010) note that learning to live with tensions of values 'better accords with the truth of the human condition' (p. 103), as the way values are understood and negotiated is complex and contradictory, and any resolutions require trade-offs that people may not be open to consider.

Norwich (2013) argues that there is a strong tradition within inclusive education that places all the emphasis on presenting inclusion from the perspective of its underpinning values but ignoring – and in some cases defying (as in Slee, 2018) – that some of these values can be interpreted differently by different people. For instance, Dyson *et al.* (2002) have described inclusive education as being about:

'The participation of students in key aspects of their schools: their *cultures*, that is their shared sets of values and expectations; their *curricula*, that is the learning experiences on offer; and their *communities*, that is the sets of relationships they sustain' (p. 12).

If we focus on the social aspect of inclusion (the focus of this paper), then the main assumption expressed in this definition is that there are shared sets of values and expectations in every school community; or that every member of the school community irrespective of their age, background and role shares the same values (and criteria for their implementation) with all other members of the community. This is an admirable aspiration, yet it does not acknowledge the possibility of different, even conflicting, interpretations of the same values. This issue has been raised in the literature:

'Talk of 'shared values' can be presumptuous. What evidence is there to suggest that [values] are indeed shared? (Pirrie and Head, 2007, p. 25).

And also, more recently:

'Although there seems to be broad consensus [on the meaning/ significance of inclusion] on a superficial level, there is much more ambiguity if one looks deeper into the values often associated with inclusion' (Felder, 2018, p. 55).

This argument has gradually received greater attention (Cigman, 2007; Felder, 2018; Norwich, 2013; Norwich and Koutsouris, 2017; Qvortrup and Qvortrup, 2018) and points to the need for a more in-depth exploration of the meaning of inclusion.

Exploring the value of inclusion from a sociological perspective, Felder (2018) distinguishes between inclusion in an interpersonal and a societal sphere. The interpersonal sphere describes the plane of personal social relationships where feelings and trust are central; and the societal sphere refers to broader frameworks that can facilitate or hinder inclusion, e.g. legislation and norms. For example, young people with disabilities can experience inclusion both in terms of attending a school where legislation, such as the Equality Act (2010), and school-specific policies apply, and their needs are met through an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or school support; and they also experience inclusion with regards to friendships, family, romantic or other relationships that can only to a certain extent be protected or (even less) prescribed by policy or human rights conventions. In addition, as each sphere interacts with the other, any distinction is rather artificial.

Felder (2018) argues that the defining element of inclusion is *freedom*, by adopting an understanding of freedom that is based on one's ability to 'realise goals and plans extending beyond their most basic needs, if they experience acceptance and security through various forms of recognition' (p. 61). *Recognition* in Felder's analysis is a pre-condition of inclusion and is about enabling social relationships (with both institutions and individuals) based on respect and appreciation of one's value; thus, inclusion can be understood as being about relationships to other people (interpersonal sphere) and institutions (societal sphere) that promote recognition. It could be expected though that people might not experience the same degree of inclusion across or within spheres. Qvortrup and Qvortrup (2018), discuss how inclusion processes cannot be separated by exclusion processes, as experience of the one likely involves the experience of the other. They argue that although total inclusion or exclusion are conceivable (as assimilation or total isolation), it is more likely that people will experience some sort of combination of inclusion and exclusion in their social relationships. For example, a child might be included in the lesson with appropriate differentiation but not

included in the playground; or included by some of their peer groups but not by others. So, inclusion and exclusion cannot be understood as polar opposites – in the sense that the experience of one can lead to the elimination of the other. In contrast to this understanding of inclusion and exclusion as symbiotic, Slee (2018) maintains that exclusion is ‘a stubborn foe’ (p. 1) (and in that sense the ‘opposite’ of inclusion), yet at the same time exclusion is ‘a part of our social, and therein our educational, DNA’ (p. 1), which implies that exclusion is an inherent, perhaps even deliberate, part of our social design.

This analysis suggests that the processes of inclusion, especially at the level of everyday social interaction, require further interrogation. A policy context, in which exclusion in its many forms appears to be increasing (e.g. House of Commons, 2018), provides a clear rationale for research. In the next section we describe how we explored this issue with young people in a small-scale empirical study.

Background of the study

This study built on previous work of one of the authors that explored young people’s preferences in the context of everyday social interaction, using scenarios (Koutsouris, 2014a; 2014b). The original study found that young people can experience a tension between individual preference and the moral imperative of including all people; yet, this tension was hardly acknowledged or discussed, as inclusion (unlike individual preference) was seen as a social good of broader moral significance. This study extended the original one by focusing not only on disability, as the original did, but on the intersection of disability with ethnicity, social class and gender – what is often called *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989) or the space where more than one dimension of identity meets, forming multiple dimensions of identity (Abes *et al.*, 2007). These intersections of identities can be associated with a unique perspective on life but also with multiple barriers.

Scenarios have often been used to explore (intersecting) dimensions of identity in different ways. Dessel *et al.* (2017), for instance, used brief hypothetical scenarios exploring intention to intervene in hostile social situations followed by the same set of questions; intersecting identities were brought forward in the analysis. Muraco (2005) explored how gender and sexuality affect evaluations of a friend’s behaviour, using short scenarios into which gender and sexuality were built as intersecting identities. Finally, Wainman *et al.* (2012) examined young children’s beliefs about exclusion based on gender and ethnicity, explored separately with consecutive short scenarios followed by a similar set of questions. The authors do not reflect on their decision to examine gender and ethnicity separately but exploring both issues in the same scenario might have been complicated for young children to discuss.

Methods

This study explored the following research question:

- Do young people experience a tension between inclusion and individual preference in their everyday social interactions – when this tension is discussed in the context of the intersection between disability, ethnicity, gender and social class?

In order to explore this question, we considered a number of different design options (including preparing a range of scenarios representing different combinations or intersections, e.g. disability and race, disability and gender etc.) but finally decided to build one main scenario and a range of variations to represent different intersections (table 1).

This particular design enabled participants to discuss the scenario taking into consideration as many dimensions of human diversity as possible, thus to some extent capturing the complexity of the intersectionality concept. The main scenario focused on disability, specifically deafness, which was selected because it offered potential diversity in language modality and thus a further 'intersection' of difference. Oral (version 1) and sign language (version 5) were explored separately as they were expected to generate different responses.

Insert table 1 here

The scenario described a dilemma that a young couple experienced as to whether to invite a friend to future social gatherings, as they had noticed that their other guests continuously avoided him. The main scenario offered some information about the friend who was avoided (named *Jamal* to indicate a non-Western cultural background), and the different variations introduced and/ or withdrew pieces of information (i.e. different intersections of identities). The main scenario and the variations are available in the appendix. Participants were asked to comment on and discuss different possible lines of action presented as responses to the question: *What should the couple do?* (table 2). The range of options are based on the findings of the original study (Koutsouris, 2014a; 2014b).

Participants

Twenty young people participated in the study. They were recruited through a UK-based University via emails that were sent to all students' email addresses or notices put on notice boards on two different campuses. Young people were also asked to let their friends know about the study, so some participants (two of them non-students) were recruited this way. We tried to ensure that the group recruited was as diverse as possible with regards to gender, country of origin, topic of study and family income. The age range was between 17 and 27 years old and only one participant declared a disability (dyslexia). Due to the scale of the study, participants were not expected to represent the whole range of diversity explored in the interviews.

Procedures

The scenario was presented in a PowerPoint form with the participant sitting close to the researcher, and the researcher guiding the participant gradually through the PowerPoint. Participants discussed all 5 variations to the main scenario and were asked to select an option from the ones provided (table 2) for each variation. They were also invited at the end of the interview to indicate which version of the scenario (table 1), i.e. intersection, they had found the most difficult to discuss. The interviews were semi-structured and emerging themes were explored in addition to the pre-designed questions; they were one-to-one, lasted approximately 40 minutes and were conducted by the authors in July 2018.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically on NVivo 12 using the constant comparison method. The analysis was informed by the conceptual framework developed in the original study (Koutsouris, 2014a; 2014b). The main themes were discussed between two members of the research team to ensure transparency and consistency (see note 1).

The study had ethical clearance from the University of Exeter. All participants signed a consent form outlining the aims of the study and gave oral permission for the recording of

their interview. Anonymity and confidentiality were applied across the study. The interviews were conducted in a conversational and friendly manner.

Insert table 2 here

Insert table 3 here

Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study, with table 3 presenting young people's responses to the question: *What should the couple do?*

There was a great diversity of responses across variations. No participant indicated that individual preference was more important than inclusion in any of the different variations, suggesting that young people valued inclusion more than preference when considering the issue in a hypothetical way. This finding, yet, should be interpreted cautiously as some of the young people indicated at the end of their interview that they based their responses on what they **should** have done in the situation, and not necessarily on what they **would** actually do, as in these examples:

'I kind of move between the situation that I know how to be nice or what nice people should do, and as you mentioned some situation like this – the real practical situation – so, I feel there's like a gap between my expectation to myself, and what I will actually do'.

'In my head it sounds worse and I tried to make it sound like it wasn't as worse'.

This also shows how scenarios allow for the exploration of people's deeper thoughts whereas providing some emotional distance: the actual question was about the actions of an imaginary couple, yet many young people discussed the issue as if it had been about themselves. In some ways these later reflections were the most interesting, revealing the tensions and dilemmas experienced by the young people as they grappled with what they should do and what they felt they would prefer to do.

Responses to different variations are discussed below, drawing on aggregate responses to the set of options provided and with illustrative examples from particular participants.

Variation 1 (main scenario): Disability (Deafness – oral language)

Most young people (11 out of 20) recognised a tension between inclusion and individual preference by selecting the option: *Talk to Jamal/ the other guests to try to find out what the problem is*. This option is about an acknowledgement that people might have different perspectives on the situation and different reasons or justifications for their behaviour that to some extent should be respected or at least voiced. Almost all young people found this scenario easy to discuss due to the nature of the difficulty that Jamal experiences; he wears a hearing aid but uses speech for his everyday communication. One participant only noted that she found it difficult to discuss as it was the first scenario and she needed time *'to get in the mindset'*. Four participants suggested that a way to resolve the situation would be an alternative, specially arranged social situation, with less noise or fewer guests, so that Jamal would be able to participate more meaningfully – as in this example: *'I would happily go out [with him], invite him round my house in a smaller group or a quieter time'*. This though meant that in order for Jamal to be included (in a specially arranged social situation), he

would have to be excluded first (from the mainstream social activity). Making alternative arrangements with Jamal was a recurring theme in the study across most variations.

Variation 2: Disability and ethnicity

The second variation of the scenario introduced the additional information that Jamal was from a different country (as his name implied, but was not confirmed in the main scenario), and that he was still learning English. Responses to the scenario were very comparable to the previous one, with the exception that 6 out of 20 people believed that Jamal should be invited again (inclusion) compared to 2 out of 20 for the main version. No people responded that he should not be invited. It is indicative that 5 out of 20 participants were non-native English speakers studying abroad in a multi-cultural environment, so there was a possible identification with the scenario to their own experiences. Another potential explanation is that language-related difficulties can be easier for people to accept compared to wearing a hearing aid, as a participant noted:

'Because most people have experience of learning a second language at school or something growing up, so they've kind of got a little bit of knowledge about that – whereas not everybody has knowledge about hearing aids and hearing impairment'.

Jamal's language difficulties were discussed as an additional barrier to his inclusion (by 15 out of 20 participants) – an idea also expressed in the excerpt below where a young woman approaches the issue with disarming honesty:

'It adds an extra layer of difficulty to form a social interaction. If you have that [hearing difficulty], it's not the end of the world when it comes to friends. But then you introduced this extra layer which is struggling to understand the English language, and people when they're at a party enjoying themselves, and when the drinks flowing, and when they've got all their other friends... The effort [...] is perhaps not worth the trouble'.

The amount of effort required to include Jamal was widely discussed by the young people (17 out of 20), across the different variations.

Variation 3: Disability and gender

The third variation was seen by many young people as the most difficult to discuss with 11 young people identifying it as such. In this variation, reference to ethnicity was removed and replaced with the information that Jamal avoided talking to women, without any particular indications as to the reasons behind this behaviour other than the fact that his name could suggest a non-Western cultural background (not otherwise confirmed). Disability (deafness) as an intersecting layer remained unchanged. Some young people felt particularly uncomfortable discussing Jamal's potential cultural beliefs, even when they felt that they were in sharp contrast to their own beliefs about gender equality, and 6 out of 20 participants would prefer the couple not to invite him again to avoid the embarrassment of the situation. Yet, many noted that Jamal might just be shy or have had previous bad experiences, so they would be inclined for the couple to discuss with him (10 out of 20). The scenario generated interesting debates about the extent to which one's culture and religion could be criticised. A small number of young people argued that culture and religion are partly a matter of personal preference, whereas disability is not – as, e.g., in this excerpt:

'I think that from the religion point it's different, because he chooses to have his religion like that. I mean, if he's brought up that way, it's just the way he lives. But with the hearing

problem, he cannot change that in any way [...] But if he just refuses to speak to women, that's different – that's him actively cutting off like half of the population'.

This is also the only variation where an alternative social situation was not suggested as a relevant resolution. This might indicate that unlike the case of disability or language barriers young people were not willing to put extra effort to accommodate cultural/ religious beliefs that they could not relate to, as these were seen as a matter of preference.

A few young people were particularly reluctant and uncomfortable to discuss this variation and argued that any criticism against other people's culture and religion is discriminating, and *'being a racist basically, no one's going to like you'*. This was also discussed in terms of an internal conflict, as in this example:

'It's a bit of a conflict going on, I guess, internally: that you'd have, on one hand, your thoughts about I need to be very understanding of other people's cultures and beliefs; but then it maybe something that in a typical British culture maybe isn't quite so [acceptable]'.

Variation 4: Disability and social class

The fourth variation removed the gender issue discussed above and introduced social class to the scenario. Jamal was presented to be a low status co-worker of the couple (a cleaner). 14 out of 20 young people argued that Jamal's work status was irrelevant to inviting him, since job status is not pertinent to forming social relationships – yet, they acknowledged that what *should* and *would* actually happen might have been different, as in this example:

*'Not just the fact that they didn't have things in common to discuss, but just really looking at him and thinking, oh, he doesn't look as posh... I feel like it **shouldn't** make a difference, but that it probably **would**...'*

This is consistent with what other young people reported across the different variations that excluding Jamal based on his personality (*'if they didn't have things in common to discuss'*) would be more acceptable than based on any other characteristics (disability, culture etc.).

Variation 5: Disability (Deafness – sign language)

This variation returned to the main version of the scenario with one significant difference: the central character is deaf, but his preferred language of communication is British Sign Language (BSL) – and not oral language as in the main version and all previous variations. This version explored the extent to which BSL was seen as an additional barrier to inclusion, and participants found this to be the second most difficult variation to discuss (8 out of 20 responses) with most young people depicting BSL as an impenetrable barrier – as e.g. in the instance below:

'If they're not talking to him, there's a very good reason – because they physically can't'.

They also highlighted the difference between previous variations and this variation:

'The majority of people don't know British Sign Language, so it's basically impossible to talk to Jamal. It would be like having a level of zero percent of communication or five percent of communication. But then with a hearing aid you might get fifty percent of communication, so there's a big difference'.

Another participant noted that there should be a balance between including all people and making sure that this is not detrimental to everybody else due to the effort involved:

'It's sort of having the balance between including him and making it a sort of impossible situation, where the whole party is about him. So, it's sort of including him to the extent that it's not detrimental to everybody'.

There were also 1-2 young people who reported that they would be willing to learn to sign, if they had a friend who would prefer this way of communication.

A tension between inclusion and individual preference

Young people described inclusion as being about stepping out of your comfort zone in a way that can be experienced as *'uncomfortableness'* or as a learning process, as in this example:

'I wouldn't want to put the pressure on my friends to have to talk to him. [...] I don't want to start throwing accusations around, and [...] I don't want to make them feel more uncomfortable when they're around him. [Yet] it's just, uncomfortableness isn't... I never view it as bad; I think it's a growing thing. So, if you put them back into their comfort zone, just like an English party, then they're not learning and they're not engaging'.

Participants noted that people might prefer to be among others perceived as similar, because communication might be easier (e.g. shared ideas, attitudes or language) and therefore be at a deeper level.

Discussion

This section discusses the main findings of the study with reference to our understanding of the processes of inclusion; and then considers implications for education.

Understanding the processes of inclusion

The main idea expressed by the young people was that including Jamal, in any of the situations discussed, involves considerable amount of effort. Some young people argued that such an effort might be at the expense of the other guests who would have to go out of their way to accommodate Jamal, for instance by turning the music down so that Jamal would be able to communicate more easily. One participant also noted that including Jamal would be so difficult that it might not worth the effort. Yet, at the same time young people were trying to identify ways of ensuring that Jamal would be able to participate, and their frustration or disappointment was caused by the acknowledgement that they could not ensure anything beyond Jamal's attendance – in other words, they could not ensure that Jamal would be able to fully engage in social interaction in a way that could be seen as being about inclusion, since his mere physical presence was not sufficient to indicate inclusion. Their approach to the sign language scenario was particularly revealing of their attitudes, since they could not identify any practical way of overcoming this barrier and the decision to invite him again was seen as polite (or the morally right decision) – but meaningless.

This is similar to Felder's (2018) example of train passengers travelling in the same coach and to the same destination, but the lack of any shared goals and intentions and the lack of any reference to the quality of their relationship makes inclusion less relevant to the situation. As discussed, Felder (2018) also relates inclusion to a particular understanding of *freedom* (as being about *recognition* rather than autonomy) and notes that freedom is rarely discussed in relation to inclusion (with some exceptions, e.g. Terzi, 2005); yet she does not give any explanations as to why. A possible reason is that acknowledging freedom – understood in this case as promoting autonomy – has often been perceived as a threat to

the purposes of inclusion that ought not to be questioned or challenged (Slee, 2018). This is consistent with the findings of the original study that served as the background of this work (Koutsouris, 2014a; 2014b). The original study found that young people might to some extent prefer to socialise with others they perceive to be similar to them either in relation to disability status or other attributes (such as values, ideas etc.). Such preferences could be expressed positively (as solidarity or a way of reinforcing a particular identity) or negatively as discrimination, fear of difference and self-exclusion (table 4). A preference for social interaction with others perceived as similar is described in sociology as *homophily* (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). Homophily seems to contradict the lay theory that ‘opposites attract’, expressing the idea that in particular social contexts similar people tend to congregate in homogeneous groups. It is indicative that homophily is rarely discussed in relation to inclusion, as it is often perceived to be a threat to inclusion – this approach focuses exclusively on the negative dimensions of this behaviour (fear of difference/discrimination) but ignores the positive dimensions that could be about the quality of social interaction. This was very strongly communicated by the participants of both the original and the current study who stressed that sharing some common ground (with regards to language, ideas, attitudes, status etc.) could enable a deeper connection. This could further be related to Felder’s (2018) understanding of freedom as *recognition*, since in some cases homophily – and not inclusion – could be the way to reach *recognition* (this is particularly relevant to sign language users and will be further discussed in the next section); and this is where the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion become less clear (Qvortrup and Qvortrup, 2018).

Thus, thinking about inclusion focusing exclusively on particular interpretations of its underpinning values (e.g. respect as participation for all) can prohibit us from taking into account other perspectives, such as homophily, for which there is empirical evidence. Yet, this can lead to a more limited understanding of inclusion, especially when it comes to everyday social interaction – or according to Felder (2018), the interpersonal sphere – that policy has arguably less influence on. This issue is discussed further in the next section, exploring the implications of this analysis for education.

Insert table 4 here

Implications for education

As Felder (2018) argues, it is possible to promote inclusion through legislation at the level of the societal sphere, but this becomes less effective for the interpersonal sphere. This idea can be revealing of the reasons behind some of the difficulties and challenges associated with inclusive education. Education is about relationships at different levels – see for example Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bio-ecological theory – but legislation and policies can promote and safeguard inclusion only to some extent. When it comes to everyday social relationships in the classroom, the playground etc. people have to negotiate their relationships with the others by themselves, and this is when other influences might gain more importance, e.g. individual preference and homophily.

This is why Felder (2018) talks about ‘inclusion for education’ rather than inclusive education, in the sense that the matter of inclusion cannot be fully resolved at policy level (societal sphere) but we also ought to understand inclusion at the level of social interaction (interpersonal sphere). Perhaps what we also need is ‘education for inclusion’, an education

that promotes the values of acceptance and recognition of people. This can be related to what one of the young people in the study noted, that inclusion is about stretching yourself, stepping out of your comfort zone and it is better understood as a process of learning about how to be more accepting of other people. However, there can be limitations in reaching recognition through inclusion, and as Felder (2018) argues:

‘While rights to societal inclusion can be defended, along with the conditions and prerequisites that make such inclusion possible, that is not the case for communal inclusion, which must be **voluntary**’ (p. 67 – emphasis added).

The idea that some might refuse inclusion, as suggested above, seems provocative or even unacceptable. However, there can be cases where inclusion can be seen as a danger for assimilation of minority groups – for example, the assimilation of students using sign language in the hearing culture of a school. In order for sign language users to become acculturated in Deaf culture, they need to be able to socialise with other sign language users. Deaf children and young people also benefit from social interaction with deaf adults who serve as role models (e.g. Cawthon *et al.*, 2016). The particularly small number of deaf people who are also sign language users and members of Deaf communities suggests that this can only be done in specialised educational settings or in settings that are designed to accommodate these students alongside their hearing peers (e.g., units in mainstream schools). Special schools for the (culturally) deaf also play a crucial role in this process (Anglin-Jaffe, 2013), and closing down these schools for the purposes of inclusion may be seen as a threat to Deaf culture and sign language – although people with deafness often would like access to Deaf culture and the hearing world alike (Anglin-Jaffe, forthcoming).

This suggests that there might be a tension between a top down approach to inclusion represented by policy and rights, and a bottom up approach reflecting community values. An example of this could be a school where inclusion policies put forward by school leaders do not reflect the ethos of the school and the values of its community.

Another possible implication for education is the extent to which the recognition of difference is considered to be about stigmatisation or a way of acknowledging individuality. Florian and Spratt (2013), for example, argue that:

‘Inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that supports teachers to respond to individual differences between learners but avoids the marginalisation that can occur when some students are treated differently’ (p. 119).

From this perspective, all students ought to be treated as far as possible in similar ways, but this makes it problematic for teachers to effectively respond to individual differences. Perspectives focusing on equality might fail to recognise individuality and different requirements, as it has been suggested by other approaches, e.g. the capability approach (Sen, 2004). The capability approach focuses on the real opportunities people have and what they need to realise these opportunities. This also applies to education: as students’ differences produce varied requirements, it is our ethical responsibility to meet these requirements – in other words, it is our ethical responsibility to offer them *recognition* in Felder’s (2018) terms and do so in ways that are not stigmatising.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn on the findings of a small-scale empirical study to discuss some of the complexities associated with inclusion in the context of social interaction, which became more apparent through the exploration of different intersections of identity. The main point of this analysis is that legislation and policy can mainly inform our efforts towards inclusion at a broader societal level, however inclusion also operates at the level of interpersonal relationships for which a top down approach has only limited influence. This calls for a deeper exploration of inclusion at the level of everyday social interaction (involving also analysis of actual social interaction instances), where factors such as homophily and individual preference can come into tension with the moral imperative of including all people. The acknowledgement that inclusion is associated with tensions not easily resolved can make us feel uncomfortable, but in the words of the young people in the study, inclusion is *precisely* about feeling uncomfortable – we just have to accept the challenge.

Note 1: For a copy of the analysis themes, email the corresponding author.

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Appendix

Insert table 5 here

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Table 1. Variations of main scenario to represent different intersections.

Scenario version		1	2	3	4	5
Main layer – disability	Deafness (oral language)	x	x	x	x	
Added layer - ethnicity	Not fluent in English		x			
Added layer – gender	Gender (and culture – implied)			x		
Added layer – social class	Work status				x	
Main layer – disability	Deafness (British Sign Language - BSL)					x

Table 2. Options to the question: *What should the couple do?*

Set of options		Main idea expressed
1	<i>Invite him again, because this is the right thing to do.</i>	Inclusion
2	<i>Invite him again, but don't make their friends talk with him.</i>	Preference A (preference is as important as inclusion)
3	<i>Don't invite him again, so their friends would not have to hang out with him.</i>	Preference B (preference is more important than inclusion)
4	<i>Don't invite him again. It is too embarrassing.</i>	Avoidance of the situation
5	<i>Talk to Jamal and to their friends about it and try to find out what the problem is.</i>	Recognition of a tension (between inclusion and preference)

Table 3. Count of responses to the question: *What should the couple do?*

Version \ Response	1	2	3	4	5
Inclusion	2	6	3	9	6
Preference A	2	4	1	0	0
Preference B	0	0	0	0	0
Avoidance	1	0	6	2	2
Tension	11	7	10	6	6
*Other	4	3	0	1	5
N/A	0	0	0	2	1
**Most difficult version to discuss	1	2	11	1	8

*make alternative arrangements for Jamal

**some participants nominated more than one version

Table 4. Reasons for homophily (based on Koutsouris, 2014a; 2014b).

Reasons for homophily: a preference for social interaction with others perceived as similar	
Positive	Negative
Easy communication; Common ground; Deep connection; Understanding; Comfort zone; Participation; Equal status; Confidence; Security; Trust	Oppression; Bullying; Fear

Table 5. Main scenario and variations

Main Scenario	Variations
<p>A young couple often invites their closest friends to their flat.</p> <p>In the most recent gatherings, they also invited a good friend, Jamal, who works in the same company as one of them.</p> <p>[Variations 1-5 were inserted here]</p> <p>It was the third time they had invited him, and they noticed that only a few of their other friends approached him or chatted with him. Unless they were around, he always ended up alone.</p> <p>They had expected this for the first couple of times, but after the third time they started feeling worried. They also felt that their other friends did not really want to socialise with him.</p> <p>A few days after each party, Jamal would send them a kind message, thanking them for the nice evening and saying that he enjoyed it a lot. After the third message, the couple started feeling really uncomfortable...</p>	<p>1. Jamal wears a hearing aid and prefers to use speech. He is easy to understand most of the time, but it can be harder to understand him when it is noisy.</p>
	<p>2. Jamal wears a hearing aid and prefers to use speech. He is easy to understand most of the time, but it can be harder to understand him when it is noisy. He is also from another country and is still learning English.</p>
	<p>3. Jamal wears a hearing aid and prefers to use speech. He is easy to understand most of the time, but it can be harder to understand him when it is noisy. He avoids talking to women.</p>
	<p>4. Jamal is a cleaner in this company. He wears a hearing aid and prefers to use speech. Jamal is easy to understand most of the time, but it can be harder to understand him when it is noisy.</p>
	<p>5. Jamal wears a hearing aid and prefers to use BSL*. The husband translates Jamal's signing to other people. *BSL: British Sign Language</p>