Citation:
Haegele, JA and Maher, AJ (2023) Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Inclusion as Intersubjective Experiences. Educational Researcher. pp. 1-31. ISSN 0013-189X DOI: https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231176287

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:
https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/9914/

Document Version:
Article (Accepted Version)

Haegele, J.A. and Maher A.J., Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Inclusion as Intersubjective Experiences, Educational Researcher, pp. 1-9. Copyright © 2023 AERA. DOI: 10.3102/0013189X231176287

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please contact us and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Toward a Conceptual Understanding of Inclusion as Intersubjective Experiences

Abstract

'Inclusion' has become a global buzzword relating to education policy and practice. Mostly, it is tied to discussions about access and opportunities in education spaces, as well as school policies and the curriculum decisions and pedagogical actions of teachers. As part of this critique, we propose inclusion as intersubjective experiences associated with feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value that are dynamic, ephemeral, spatial and in flux. Here, we advocate for centering the experiences and amplifying the voices of disabled children and young people in and about education spaces, while acknowledging the wider social forces that structure those spaces, as only disabled young people can explain how they feel in the educational spaces they find themselves.

Key words: Disability; Inclusion; Feelings of Belonging; Feelings of Value; Feelings of Acceptance.

Introduction

Since its introduction into the international educational vernacular, which is typically linked to the World Education Forums of Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 and Salamanca in Spain in 1994 (Slee, 2018), inclusion has become a global buzzword that now guides educational policy and practice. However, the meaning of the term inclusion is contentious, and according to Moore and Slee (2020), has been commandeered by special education scholars and teachers to now represent a form of 'eduspeak' that is devoid of its political and educational intent. Because the meaning of the term inclusion is tied to different histories, cultures, and epistemological assumptions (Kozleski et al., 2011), is constantly changing (Imray & Colley, 2017), and often tied to the spaces and circumstances in which it is used (Petrie et al., 2018), it is difficult to postulate what a general theory of inclusive education entails (Slee, 2018). The waters are further muddied by the fact that inclusion, as a concept, is not exclusive to the educational experiences of disabled students.[1] Indeed, conceptualizations of inclusion have been developed and are drawn upon to discuss other identity markers such as race, sexuality, social class, gender, and nationality, individually and as intersecting forces of oppression (Messiou, 2017). As such, according to Nilholm and Goransson (2017), the ambiguous nature of inclusion, and variety of meanings the term can take on, may stunt our ability to develop an understanding of how to embrace, enhance, and utilize this concept in scholarship and practice. Moreover, the lack of a clear understanding on what inclusion is makes it difficult to determine whether policies and practices are successful in facilitating or achieving inclusion for the persons they claim to serve (Cobigo et al., 2012).

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities compels parties to provide an inclusive education system for disabled students (United Nations,

2006). However, the development of inclusive policy and practice within schools has proved difficult, not least because interpretations of inclusion and how it should be enacted are inconsistent, and change over time (Kozleski et al., 2011). In this paper, we endeavor to provide some conceptual clarity while, at the same time, extending what we contend are often narrow, parochial, and reductive conceptualizations of inclusion vis-à-vis disability by centering disabled students, rather than government and school policy and practice, to discuss inclusion as something that disabled students intersubjectively experience in the spaces they find themselves.

For us, education spaces are not fixed nor absolute. Material spaces such as schools, classrooms, playgrounds, and gymnasia are not containers of human activity or blank canvases. Rather, they are socially constructed and (re)produced through human interactions (Armstrong, 2012) – teachers interacting with students, students with other students, students with paraeducators, and so on. Here, it is crucial to note that power permeates relationships and interactions – both directly and indirectly – that work to structure and shape education and school spaces (Waitoller & Annamma, 2017). In this article, we consider power as a structural characteristic of all human relationships that is often, but not exclusively, skewed towards dominant groups, especially those with their hands on the levers of power in education, such as policy makers, government officials, and senior leaders and administrators in schools (Engelstad, 2009). Power, for us, relates to the ways and extent to which an individual or group can shape the ideologies and behaviors of other individuals or groups (Engelstad, 2009). Thus, the meanings that disabled students ascribe to inclusion and the school spaces they find themselves in, and the interactions they experience with those who are part of their relational networks, are influenced – by degrees – by the ideologies and behaviors of others. In short, power relationships and interactions, that involve negotiation, contestation and compromise, act to structure school

spaces and thus the intersubjective experiences of disabled students within those spaces (Kitchen, 1998).

A key feature of our article is that it explores inclusion as intersubjective experiences which centralize the lived, embodied experiences of disabled students, as their lives and bodies connect to and interact with others in the spaces they find themselves. We view this conceptualization as being aligned with calls to amplify the voices of disabled persons about their subjective experiences (Pellicano et al., 2014). Of course, we are not the first nor will we be the last to champion the embodied perspectives of disabled students when considering what inclusive education can and should be. For instance, Shah (2007) gathered data from physically disabled students about their experiences of integrated and segregated schooling. In this research, discussions about inclusion were tied to material space, emphasizing the importance of physically disabled students being able to choose whether they attended an integrated or segregated school. In a similar vein, disabled participants in research by Vlachou and Papananou (2015) emphasized choice of school as integral to discussions about inclusion, together with social interactions with peers and teachers, and their experiences of school curriculum. Taylor (2018) has been vocal in their criticism of excluding intellectually disabled students from knowledge making, referring to it as a threat to democratic citizenship (Taylor, 2020). Similarly, Milton (2014) has problematized research 'about' autism that ignores the embodied experiences of autistic people, calling into question the ethical and epistemological integrity of such research. Gibson's (2006) work advocated for amplifying the voices of students with special educational needs, and encouraged dialogue between pupils, families, school, education authorities and other related professions to break a 'culture of silence' (p. 316) vis-à-vis the education experiences of pupils with special educational needs views. Here, discussion about inclusion were anchored

mainly to policy decisions and practices in schools, but also the social and relational aspect of inclusion (Gibson, 2006). More recently, Messiou (2017) and Ainscow and Messiou (2018) implored scholars to gather evidence from disabled students, considering inclusion in relation to student presence, participation, and achievement.

While there is an increasing body of knowledge that endeavors to amplify the voices of disabled students about their views on inclusion and experiences within different material spaces in schools, none of it considers inclusion as intersubjective experiences of belonging, acceptance and value in the spaces that disabled students find themselves in and construct meaning about. It is here that the novelty of our conceptualization of inclusion and thus this paper lies. Our focus on (education and school) spaces responds to Roulstone et al.'s (2014) call for critical reviewing, conceptualizing and exploring the ways in which spatial constructs re/shape and re/frame disabled people's experience of the social world. We conclude this article by discussing implications of conceptualizations of inclusion that are relevant for scholars and practitioners. It is important to note that we are not presenting our conceptualization as all-encompassing, where all representations of inclusion must fit neatly into our depictions. Rather, we suggest ways in which scholars and practitioners should think about their utilization of the term inclusion, and the implications that come with adopting such conceptualizations. Like Maher (2018), we encourage others to critically reflect on their ideological commitments to concepts of inclusion because how practitioners conceptualize inclusion influences how they endeavor to shape school spaces and thus the intersubjective experiences of disabled students.

Inclusion as Intersubjective Experiences

For us, inclusion is more than an individual's quantifiable existence within the material space of a school. Nevertheless, this is the position that is generally taken by scholars and

practitioners, who celebrate the integration – referred to as *technical* inclusion by Connor and Berman (2019) – of disabled students within the same material space (i.e., an integrated school) as their non-disabled peers as successful inclusion (Cobigo et al., 2012; Haegele, 2019). This purview is understandable, when considered against a backdrop of disability activism and academic literature relating to geographies and histories of exclusion among disabled young people that views segregated school spaces as perpetuating forms of discrimination, the re-production of stereotypes and negative assumptions about the bodies and abilities of disabled students (e.g., Armstrong 2007; D'Alessio, 2022).

While not ignoring or challenging these claims, we contend that conceptualizing inclusion merely in terms of an autonomous, disconnected, and disembodied individual's presence within a material space and proximity of their peers, what Imrie (2014) terms the 'spatial logic', ignores the meanings and satisfactions that students can and should derive from those experiences (Martin Ginis et al., 2017). As such, conceptualizations of inclusion must extend beyond materiality and the physical existence of an individual within a space and must consider the person's intersubjective experiences within that space (Richardson & Motl, 2020). With that, it matters less if what we, as education scholars, teacher educators or teachers, see or what we hear is indicative of our own perceptions of inclusion, but rather what matters more is how a plurality of people feel and whether they feel, both cognitively and affectively, included as active agents interacting with and connecting to others (Reich, 2010) in the school spaces that they find themselves.

Intersubjective experiences shape a persons' perceptions and beliefs of their interactions with the world, primarily its natural features, as well as biological, social, and material entities that inhibit the world such as subjects and objects (Bottero, 2010). One's intersubjectivity acts as

a filter that influences how individuals and groups interpret the world through mental, sensory, and linguistic processes. Embodied experiences, and the meaning constructed about them, are both shared and individual, which distinguishes the intersubjective from the subjective (Heshusius, 1994; Reich, 2010). While subjectivity clearly distinguishes and arguably separates the self from others and thus constructs an alienated mode of consciousness, intersubjectivity relates to a participatory consciousness whereby it is acknowledged that self and others are interdependently linked (Heshusius, 1994). Hence, the meanings and feelings that are constructed and experienced by disabled students about inclusion are tied to the interactions they have with others that are part of their relational network both inside (e.g., teachers, teaching assistants, other students) and outside (e.g., parents, family members, friends) of school.

Since intersubjectivity relates to how individual- and group- mind-bodies experience and make sense of the world, researchers and practitioners must commit, as we (e.g., Haegele, 2019; Haegele & Maher, 2022) and others have done (e.g., Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Vlachou & Papananou, 2015) to engaging with voices of disabled persons to enable them to make themselves heard and to have their perspectives available to others in the construction of their experiences of inclusion in education (Ashby, 2011; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). By doing so, academics will take up calls to amplify the voices of disabled persons in research about inclusion (e.g., Chown et al., 2017), and align their research with the 'nothing about us, without us' disability activist movement that emphasizes the importance of endeavoring to empower and emancipate disabled selves through centering their experiences and amplifying their voices (Charlton, 2000).

Considering inclusion as intersubjective experiences allow it to take on a fluid nature, where a disabled student's perception and feelings of inclusion can change depending on what

they are experiencing. In this respect, it is crucial to note that those experiences are shaped by the culture of education systems and schools – that is, the dominant ideologies, values, traditions, and behaviors (Engelstad, 2009) – as well as the power that permeates the interdependent relationships (Elias, 1978) with others who are part of the relational networks of disabled students. In our view, this mode of thinking moves beyond established concepts of inclusion, particularly those that tie it to material spaces only, such as integrated schools, which are often static and consider inclusion as a finite and fixed state of being. As such, inclusion takes on what Sojo (2009) refers to as an ontological spatiality of being, where spatial, relational, and temporal dimensions are relevant, and where individuals and groups may feel, or not feel, included throughout the course of a class session depending on what they experience and how they make sense of and construct meaning about those experiences as the interact with others. This point is crucial given the social nature and interdependency of intersubjectivity (Reich, 2010).

Considering inclusion as a lived, embodied, intersubjective experiences is not relegated to one material space one (i.e. a integrated school). That is, with inclusion conceptualized as intersubjective experiences, persons may experience individual or shared feelings associated with inclusion in any host of material or social spaces. In educational contexts, for instance, intersubjective feelings of inclusion may be experienced in integrated and/or self-contained settings,[3] as well as other unique settings, such as those with small numbers of non-disabled students in classes with disabled students. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that our suggestion that self-contained settings should be considered as part of a nuanced and more sophisticated conceptualization of inclusion may seem radical and be contentious given that many disability studies scholars and activists, in the US especially, equate integrated settings to inclusive experiences (Heck & Block, 2019; Stainback & Stainback, 1996) and may find experiencing

inclusion outside of these settings to be idealistic or conceptually inconsistent. Here, it is important to note that other countries, such as those that form the United Kingdom (UK), have been more inclined to consider self-contained educational settings in broader discussions about what inclusion entails in terms of education policy and practice (see Maher & Fitzgerald, 2020). In this respect, it is important to note research that has identified that feelings associated with inclusion appear to be available in self-contained spaces (Pellerin et al., 2020), perhaps to a greater degree than in integrated settings (Holland & Haegele, 2021). We should acknowledge, though, that the work of Maher and Fitzgerald (2022) and Pellerin et al. (2020) may serve as evidence that those who are in positions of power in integrated schools are, intentionally or otherwise, constructing what Soldatic et al. (2014) refers to as disabling spaces in integrated schools because they are not sensitized to the needs and abilities of disabled students and, thus, are unwelcoming.

To develop modes of thinking about inclusion, we advocate for a conceptualization of inclusion as intersubjective experiences associated with feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value that can occur in any space in any school. According to Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010), this conceptualization, initially based off of Stainback and Stainback's (1996) understanding of inclusion, "is in line with the position that inclusion is a [inter]subjective experience and central to its understanding are the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of children with disabilities" (p.276). However, the expressions 'feeling a sense of belonging', 'feeling accepted' and 'feeling valued' in educational scholarship and practitioner research have typically been used as taken-for-granted phrases, where the meaning is neither explored nor defined. As such, in the following sections, we discuss each of these features of inclusive experiences, and what they can mean to disabled students within education spaces.

'Feeling a Sense of Belonging'

A recent journal special issue by Slee (2019) reminds us that, like inclusion, the concept of belonging is not exclusive to the experiences and feelings of disabled people. Nonetheless, for our purposes, we center the intersubjective experiences of disabled people because fostering feelings of belonging is crucial to the construction of what Connor and Bauman (2019) term the *authentic* inclusion of disabled students in school spaces. According to Mahar and colleagues (2013), a sense of belonging is a (inter)subjective perception that centers on feelings. Belonging is fluid and spatial, and feelings of being connected to and cared for by others are central features (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Mahar et al., 2013), hence its intersubjective nature. Feeling needed, important, integral, respected, or in harmony with the group or system characterizes most definitions of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013). These conceptualizations align with our beliefs about inclusion as intersubjective experiences, which centers on how people feel and whether they feel a sense of belonging based on their embodied experiences of interacting with subjects and objects in the spaces they find themselves. The intersubjectivity and spatiality of belonging was emphasized by Kitchen (1998) who suggested that disabled people are determined to belong in one space and not in another, depending on their relationship to nondisabled others. When disabled people are out-of-place it is a cause for concern because of perceived threat to power relations and the status quo.

A sense of belonging is a natural, life-long desire and basic human need, as people want to be socially connected to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1962). That is, people want to be part of a community and feel like other members want them to be part of the same community. Experiencing a sense of belonging in school spaces has been identified as a critical need, including for marginalized students and those who experience discrimination (Crouch et

al., 2014), as a strong sense of belonging has been linked to a variety of academic, physical, and psychological benefits (Crouch et al., 2014; D'Eloia & Price, 2018). However, according to Crouch and colleagues (2014), structured ableism, teasing, ostracism, and alienation are indicative of the unequal distribution of power between those who have most and least influence over shaping school spaces, such as disabled and non-disabled people, and are threats to feelings of belonging experienced by disabled students in integrated school spaces. This purview aligns with the work of Soja (2010) who uses of the concept of spatial injustice to discuss locational discrimination as fundamental in the production of spatial injustice and the creation of lasting spatial structures that privilege and disadvantage disabled people.

Negative peer interactions in such spaces can have deleterious effects, increasing depression while lowering self-esteem and school attendance among youth. This may be particularly true in educational spaces where experiences with social isolation, teasing, incompetent or interfering help, and physical exclusion are commonly reported among disabled students (Bredahl, 2013; Tanure Alves et al., 2018). Hence, when we advocate for a focus on belonging, we differentiate it from normative or normalized belonging. For us, normative belonging from the perspective of disability is based on an unequal distribution of power between disabled and nondisabled students given that it is the former who are expected to assimilate into the established, often ableist, social spaces of and in schools (Goodley, 2014). Instead, our consideration of belonging is about disabled students feeling needed, important, integral, respected and in harmony with other students (Mahar et al., 2013) because of, not despite, who they are and what they can do as sentient embodied beings. Here, there is a focus on understanding and celebrating difference, whether it be actual or perceptual.

There are several points that should be accounted for when considering threats to belonging. First and foremost, we continue to encourage scholars and practitioners to center understandings of belonging on the voices of disabled students to explore intersubjective, lived, and embodied experiences. That is, we must move away from considering the purveyor of service as expert (Goodwin & Rossow-Kimball, 2012), and more importantly consider feelings of belonging of disabled students and their peers as the interact in school spaces. Like Maher and Morley (2020), we are critical of the taken-for-granted assumption that non-disabled adult scholars, policy makers, and practitioners can and should cognitively and affectively imagine how disabled students experience schools to make judgements about how, if at all, inclusive schools are. Secondly, the existence of reciprocal and intimate friendships is considered an important facilitator of, but also a source of tension for, a sense of belonging and connectedness for disabled youth (D'Eloia & Price, 2018). That is, while friendships are fundamental in establishing a sense of belonging, the reciprocity and intimacy necessary to build meaningful friendships may be lacking, perhaps because of the hierarchical nature of these relationships whereby disabled youth are often subordinated by their peers (D'Eloia & Price, 2018). Further complicating friendship development between disabled and non-disabled youth is stigma, where the stigma around disability tends to act as a barrier. Interestingly, Salmon (2013) identified that to negotiate stigma, disabled teens appear to choose to self-exclude from non-disabled peers, instead seeking out friendships with other disabled students where experiences of stigma and disability are shared and thus arguably more likely to be intersubjective (Reich, 2010).

'Feeling Accepted'

Sometimes considered as part of conceptual discussions about belonging (Shirazipour et al., 2017), we view feelings of acceptance as a peer-related concept which entails an individual's

perception of how others involve them in the spaces they inhabit. The experience of community is a central component of feeling accepted, and one's existence within a community is an intersubjective phenomenon where everyone can have shared and individual experiences of that group (Walker, 1999). The characteristic of community, and acceptance within it, is well-aligned with the (inter)subjective nature of experiences of inclusion (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). In addition, seldom do people, disabled or otherwise, experience universal acceptance (or, rejection) always, in all spaces. Rather, people may feel accepted in some instances and within some space, whereas they feel unwelcomed or rejected in others (Walker, 1999), which is in keeping with the fluid nature of feeling included as part of our broader conceptualization of inclusion. Feeling accepted and included are not guaranteed over time or across education spaces.

Feeling accepted within a space has a bi-directional association with positive interactions with others who also inhabit and shape the ideologies, traditions, and behaviors that structure that space. That is, people are more likely to feel accepted within a space when they engage in positive interactions and develop positive relationships with others, such as disabled students and their teachers, support staff and other students. In turn, feeling accepted also tends to encourage more interactions with others (Walker, 1999). As such, positive social interactions within a space clearly have a critical role to play within feeling accepted and thus feelings of inclusion. Unfortunately, the established ideologies, traditions, and behaviors in schools, which are often ableist and thus reinforce the unequal distribution of power between disabled and nondisabled students (Goodley, 2014), mean that it is not uncommon for disabled students to be marginalized and even ostracized in integrated schools generally and so-called 'inclusive' education specifically (Maher, 2018). Thus, to help enhance feeling accepted, it is imperative that scholars,

policy makers, school leaders, teachers, and other key stakeholders consider characteristics of those space that may enhance positive social interactions and relationship building (Pesonen, 2016).

According to Pesonen (2016), stakeholders whose professional values, beliefs, and behaviors are aligned with creating welcoming and accepting spaces are crucial to the development and fostering of supportive climates. Here, the role of those who have their hands of the levers of power in education and schools, such as policy makers and school leaders, is crucial in shaping the ideologies, values, customs, and behaviors that structure spaces in schools (Engelstad, 2009). So, too, is the role of educators, who are charged with being responsible for understanding how to create and support environments that foster feelings of acceptance. Gaining access to a material space is therefore by itself not enough for fostering feelings of acceptance; instead, other social and pedagogical considerations must be made (Wilhemsen et al., 2019). Teachers are encouraged to focus on fostering environments that welcome disabled students into school spaces and assist in the development of non-judgmental relationships with other students and staff. Some considerations for the development of non-judgmental relationships from Shirazipour and colleagues (2017) can become central to the work of educators to foster welcoming spaces, such as activities where students learn about one's capabilities, ask that individual to demonstrate that skill, and gain a recognition and appreciation for those skills. There is perhaps also a need to disrupt dominant, ableist perceptions of ability, which elevate normative ways of doing and being, because they too act as barriers to disabled students experiencing feelings of acceptance and, as we shall see below, value (Maher et al., 2021).

'Feeling Valued'

To conceptualize feeling valued, we borrowed from the work of Marian Iszatt-White, who has explored and defined the concept in workplace leadership research. White and Mackenzie-Davey (2003) defined feeling valued as "a positive affective response arising from a confirmation, within a congruent set of criteria, of an individual's possession of the qualities on which worth or desirability depends" (p. 228). According to White (2005), feeling valued "arises from a moment-by-moment, real-time expression of value for some ability or quality which the recipient considers to be important, and resides in a sense of fairness or appropriateness of such expressions" (p. 2). The temporal - and we would add spatial - component described by White (2005) supports the fluid nature of inclusion that can vary on a moment-to-moment basis depending on changes in which the individual and group experience in different spaces. As such, feeling valued can be seen as a positive emotion centered on how others evaluate an individual in relation to some ability or characteristic that they consider to be important (White & Mackenzie-Davey, 2003).

We are interested in how disabled students experience feeling valued within educational spaces, and there are several important considerations that are salient in White's conceptualizations. First, there is a difference between knowing that one's work or abilities is valued and feeling as though it is, and the latter rests largely on some form of praise or recognition from others about that work or ability (White, 2005). This consideration points toward the critical role that others, whether teachers, peers, or other stakeholders, play in the construction of perceptions of value for disabled persons in educational spaces. That is, feelings of one's own value is contingent on others communicating the belief that disabled persons possess desirable qualities or abilities, through providing some form of praise or recognition. For us, this ties neatly to the capabilities approach, first applied to education by Terzi (2005), which

compels educators to disrupt deficit understandings of disability whereby emphasis is placed on what disabled students cannot do, when compared to their non-disabled peers, by centering and celebrating the capabilities of disabled students. While teachers can also show that they value students' abilities or qualities using a variety of different pedagogical methods, such as celebrating academic and other achievements, or selecting students to act like an example in class, the absence of these behaviors can have determinantal effects.

White's (2005) second salient consideration suggests that feeling valued is a relative concept, which depends on our opinions of others, the salience to us of what is being valued, and our own view of our 'deserving' those views. In school spaces, there is a clear hierarchy where teachers are positioned as the authority figure who, if given the expressive freedom to do so, can significantly shape the traditions, rituals, and beliefs, including what is considered valuable or desirable, of their subject (Maher & Fitzgerald, 2020). For those interested in supporting the development of feelings of value as a component of intersubjective experiences of inclusion within school spaces, constructing pedagogical environments that confirm each student's possession of qualities that are worthy and desirable is an important consideration that must be further developed in research and practice. Yet, there is only so much teachers can do when cast against a backdrop of ableism that pervades all material and social spaces, including education, deeming the minds and bodies of disabled people as flawed, even broken, and thus less-human (Campbell, 2009).

Implications for Scholarship & Practice

The re-orientation of inclusion as intersubjective experiences has several implications for scholarship and practice. Chief among the implications for scholarship is the need for academics to amplify the voices of disabled students in research about inclusion (Pellicano et al., 2014). We

use the term *amplify* here purposely, as we do not ascribe to a position that we are *giving* or *allowing* voice because that would symbolically reinforce the power disparities that cut across traditional binary relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, adults and young people, and teachers and students. It is these traditionally hierarchical power relationships that we are endeavoring to disrupt through our reconceptualization. Thus, we encourage scholars to *amplify* the voices of disabled participants to help liberate their perspectives as co-constructors of knowledge. In this respect, it is proper to acknowledge that disabled students have expert knowledge about disability because it is inscribed in their lived and living bodies (Maher et al., 2021). Similarly, since intersubjective experiences are encoded in the bodies of disabled students, we, like Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson (2010), advocate that conceptualization of inclusion requires investigation of the inclusiveness of experiences from the perspectives of those being included. To do so, we believe in the need for participatory and/or emancipatory research which involves a partnership between academic researchers and disabled persons who are affected by the matter under investigation (Chown et al, 2017). While it is beyond the scope of this article to explore participatory and emancipatory research theory and practice, we suggest Aldridge (2016), Keefe et al. (2006), Milton (2014), Wickenden and Gayatri Kembhavi-Tam (2014) and Woolhouse (2019) as starting points.

When we amplify the voices of disabled persons about research, it allows research consumers and practitioners to gain an understanding of *how* disabled persons privately experience very public events. For instance, there is a litany of examples of direct psycho-emotional disablism within literature that discusses experiences in integrated education with disabled persons, including experiences with marginalization, othering, and bullying by peers and teachers (Holland & Haegele, 2020). This line of inquiry has exposed that ableism is likely

embedded within the sociocultural fabric of integrated schools, and that although disabled students exist in the same spaces as their non-disabled peers, their experiences are markedly different. We must be mindful, as well, that when the unit of analysis is the individual, different kinds of identities, wrapped around, for example, socialization, sexuality, agency, power, appearance, ethnicity, culture, and language, must be navigated. Each requires different kinds of support and exploration when engaging with intersubjective experiences. These findings have practical implications, where practitioners must not assume inclusivity of their instruction, but rather must engage in dialogue with disabled persons as the experiential experts to understand the impact of curriculum and pedagogical decisions. In this way, we suggest that practitioners embrace the role of non-expert, and value knowledge gained from students within their classes over knowledge they gained from textbooks (Goodwin & Rossow-Kimball, 2012).

Inclusion conceptualized as intersubjective experiences extends beyond materiality and past physical environments and learning materials (Richardson & Motl, 2020). As such, this orientation also calls for scholars and practitioners to critically (re)consider the use of 'objective' observational methods that are used to determine whether pedagogical practices are inclusive. We would argue that observational methods, such as inclusion checklists or other 'inclusive strategies', deprioritize the voices of disabled students in favor of providing simple boxes for scholars and practitioners to check to create the illusion of inclusion. Moreover, according to Connor and Berman (2019), many disabled students defy categorizations relating to automated responses in the form of prescribed interventions and readymade checklists. Problematically, disabled people themselves are seldom enlisted in the production of these inclusion checklists (Moore & Slee, 2020), and therefore the cognitive authority of determining 'what is inclusive' is centered on the professional, rather than the intersubjective, embodied experiences of disabled

students. As such, it could be argued that the construction and usage of observational methods contributes more to creating an impression, even a fabrication, of inclusion, rather than inclusion centering on the intersubjective experiences of those being included.

While our paper advocates for exploring the intersubjective experiences of disabled students vis-à-vis feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value through amplifying their voices, it is crucial that we and others follow Artiles et al.'s (2010) lead and end by situating such experiences and feelings in relation to cultural forces that shape spaces in education. The mechanisms of cultural (re)production in schools (Engelstad, 2009), such as policy, resourcing, staff professional development, curriculum decisions, assessment arrangements, and pedagogical actions, influence intersubjective feelings. Therefore, there is a need for the voices of disabled students to influence these mechanisms of cultural (re)production. Involving disabled students – and, indeed, their parents – in the construction of school policies, decisions about resourcing, and discussions about staff professional development priorities are all notable and feasible examples. So, too, is eliciting the views of disabled students about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as part of teaching and learning processes. Disabled students and their families need to be part of a social movement towards deeper and more complex constructions of inclusive school policy and practice (Messiou, 2019; Tomlinson, 2014). For us, enhancing the agency of disabled students like this is crucial and aligns with Finkelstein's (1993) call to counter the dominant narrative of school spaces, which considers them as passive categories, rather than spaces of resistance, which the state and its agents use to subordinate disabled students as part of its broader structures of governmentality. What we suggest here is not radical; it is certainly doable in those schools truly committed to providing 'inclusive' education spaces for disabled students.

Conclusion

We wrote this article to critique hegemonic, often taken-for-granted, conceptualizations of inclusion that we believe are narrow, parochial, restrictive, and deterministic. As part of that critique, we encourage our readers to consider inclusion as intersubjective experiences associated with feelings of belonging, acceptance and value that are dynamic, spatial and in flux. The spaces within which feelings of belonging, acceptance and value are experienced are not containers of life and human activity; they are highly active and significant in determining the nature of experience and the meanings that disabled students construct about them (Warren & Garthwaite, 2014). This mode of thinking, we believe, allows scholars and practitioners to move beyond what Connor and Berman (2019) term technical considerations of inclusion, which are tied to material space, policy and even curriculum and pedagogical decisions.

For us, it is crucial that adults center the experiences and amplify the voices of disabled children and young people in education spaces. While excellent work has been done in this respect (e.g., Ainscow & Messiou, 2018; Gibson, 2006; Milton, 2014; Shah, 2007; Taylor, 2018; Vlachou & Papananou, 2015), none of that research explores disabled students' intersubjective experiences of belonging, acceptance, and value in the spaces them find themselves. This is a notable gap in academic knowledge that needs filling. At the same time, we appreciate that the pervasiveness of Neoliberalism, with its focus on education standards tied validity, normativity, and actuality, and how it often works to subordinate activities informed by social justice, equity, and inclusion (Grimaldi, 2011). Nonetheless, the voices of disabled students are crucial because they have expert knowledge in that they have lived, embodied experience of disability, and are the ones that experience attempts to construct inclusive spaces. We are not suggesting that this mode of thinking should be accepted and others discarded. Indeed, it is crucial to acknowledge and (continue to) actively challenge the wider – often ableist – structural, spatial, and attitudinal

factors that shape the educational experiences of disabled students. Instead, we hope that this paper encourages scholars and practitioners to think about inclusion in more diverse and nuanced ways, and that they actively endeavor to construct learning spaces that foster feelings of belonging, acceptance, and value among disabled students and their peers. We call for scholars that share differing views on inclusion to join in an academic dialogue about the meaning of the term, to have a productive discourse that can benefit our field. If nothing else, we hope that this paper has encouraged our reader to pause and think about disabled students and inclusion.

Notes:

[1]For conceptual articles such as this, we use 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities'. While we acknowledge the relationship between person-first language and personhood, we, like Shildrick (2012), consider it problematic as it treats disability 'as more of a contingent add-on than a fundamental in the production of identities' (p. 40).

[2]The term integrated is used simply here to describe a setting in which all students, regardless of educational needs, are educated in the same physical space (Haegele, 2019).

[3] Self-contained settings typically involve educating disabled students separately from non-disabled students, oftentimes based on the claim that integrated schools cannot meet the learning needs of the disabled student.

References

Ainscow, M., & Messiou, K. (2018) Engaging with the views of students to promote inclusion in education. *Journal of Educational Change, 19*, 1-17.

Aldridge, J. (2016). *Participatory Research. Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice*. Policy Press.

Armstrong, F. (2012) Landscapes, spatial justice and learning communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16 (5-6), 609-626.

Artiles, A., Kozleski, E., Trent, S., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining disproportionality, 1968–2008: A critique of underlying views of culture. *Exceptional Children*, 76(3), 279-299.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529.

Bottero, W. (2010). Intersubjectivity and Bourdieusian approaches to 'identity'. *Cultural Sociology*, *4*(1), 3-22.

Bredahl, A. (2013). Sitting and watching the others being active: The experienced difficulties in PE when having a disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 30*(1), 40–58.

Campbell, F. (2009). *The contours of ableism: The production of disability and ableness*. Palgrave.

Cefai, C., & Cooper, P. (2010). Students without voices: The unheard accounts of secondary school students with social, emotional and behavior difficulties. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(2), 183–198

Charlton, J. I. (2000). *Nothing about us, without us: Disability oppression and empowerment.* University of California Press.

Chown, N., Robinson, J., Beardon, L., Downing, J., Hughes, L., Leatherland, J., Fox, K., Hickman, L., & Macgregor, D. (2017). Improving research about us, with us: A draft framework for inclusive autism research. *Disability & Society, 32*(5), 720-735.

Cobigo, V., Ouellette-Kuntz, H., Lysaght, R., & Martin, L. (2012). Shifting our conceptualization of social inclusion. *Stigma Research and Action, 2*(2), 75-84.

Connor, D., & Berman, D. (2019). (Be)Longing: A family's desire for authentic inclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *23*(9), 923-936.

Connor, D., Ferri, B., & Annamma, S. (Eds.) (2016) *DisCrit: Disability studies and critical race theory in education*. Teachers College Press.

Crouch, R., Keys, C. B., & McMahon, S. D. (2014). Student-teacher relationships matter for school inclusion: School belonging, disability, and school transitions. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 42*(1), 20-30.

D'Eloia, M. H., & Price, P. (2018). Sense of belonging: is inclusion the answer? *Sport in Society, 21*(1), 91-105.

Elias, N. (1978) *What is sociology?* Columbia University Press.

Engelstad, F. (2009). Culture and power In S. Clegg and M. Haugaard (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Power* (pp.210-238). Sage.

Finkelstein, V. (1993). Disability: A social challenge or an administrative responsibility? In J. Swain, V. Finkelstein, S. French, & M. Oliver (Eds). *Disabling barriers – enabling environments* (pp. 34-43). Sage Publications and Open University Press.

Gibson, S. (2006). Beyond a 'culture of silence': inclusive education and the liberation of 'voice'. *Disability & Society*, 21(4), 315-329, DOI: 10.1080/09687590600679956.

Goodley, D. (2014) Dis/Ability studies: Theorizing disablism and ableism. New York: Routledge.

Goodwin, D. L., & Rossow-Kimball, B. (2012). Thinking ethically about professional practice in adapted physical activity. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 29,* 295-309.

Grimaldi, E. (2012). Neoliberalism and the marginalisation of social justice: the making of an education policy to combat social exclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*(11), 1131-1154.

Heck, S., & Block, M. E. (2019). *Inclusive physical education around the world.* Routledge.

Haegele, J. A. (2019). Inclusion illusion: Questioning the inclusiveness of integrated physical education. *Quest, 71*(4), 387-397. doi:10.1080/00336297.2019.1602547

Haegele, J. A., & Maher, A. J. (2022). Male autistic youth experiences of belonging in integrated physical education. *Autism, 26*(1), 51-61.

Holland, K., & Haegele, J. A. (2021). Perspectives of students with disabilities toward physical education: A review update 2014-2019. *Kinesiology Review, 10*(1), 78-87. doi:10.1123/kr.2020-002

Heshusius, L. (1994). Freeing ourselves from objectivity: Managing subjectivity or turning toward a participatory mode of consciousness. *Educational Researcher, 23*(3), 15-22.

Imray, P., & Colley, A. (2017). *Inclusion is dead: Long live inclusion.* Taylor & Francis.

Keefe, E., Moore, V., & Duff, F. (2006). *Listening to the experts: Students with disabilities speak out*. Brookes.

Kozleski, E., Artiles, A., & Waitoller, F. (2011). Equity in inclusive education: Historical trajectories and theoretical commitments. In A. Artiles, E. Kozleski and F. Waitoller (Eds.), *Inclusive education: Examining equity on five continents*. 1–14. Harvard Education Press.

Leder, D. (1990). *The absent body.* The University of Chicago Press.

Maher, A. J. (2018) "Disable them all": SENCO and LSA conceptualisations of inclusion in physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 23 (2), 149-161.

Maher, A. J. & Fitzgerald, H. (2020) 'The culture of special schools: The nature, purpose and value of physical education', *Educational Review*. E-publication ahead of print. doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1897562

Maher, A. J. Haegele, J. A., & Sparkes, A. (2021). '"It's better than going into it blind": Reflections by people with visual impairments regarding the use of simulation for pedagogical purposes. *Sport, Education and Society*. E-publication ahead of print. doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1897562

Maher, A. J., & Morley, D. (2020). The Self stepping into the shoes of the Other: Understanding and developing empathy among prospective physical education teachers through a special school placement. *European Physical Education Review*, *26*(4), 848-868.

Martin Ginis, K. A., Evans, M. B., Mortenson, W. B., & Noreau, L. (2017). Broadening the conceptualization of participation of persons with physical educations: A configurative review and recommendations. *Archives of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, 98*(2), 395-402.

Messiou, K. (2017). Research in the field of inclusive education: Time for a rethink?, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 21(2), 146-159, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2016.1223184.

Messiou, K. (2019). Understanding marginalisation through dialogue: a strategy for promoting the inclusion of all students in schools. *Educational Review*, *71*(3), 306-317.

Milton, D. (2014). Autistic expertise: A critical reflection on the production of knowledge in autism studies. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, *18*(7), 794–802.

Moore, M., & Slee, R. (2020). *Inclusive education & exclusion*. In N. Watson & S. Vehmas, *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* (pp. 265-280). Routledge.

Nilholm, C., & Goransson, K. (2017). What is meant by inclusion? An analysis of European and North American journal articles with high impact. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 32*(3), 437-451.

Pellerin, S., Wilson, W. J., & Haegele, J. A. (2020). The experiences of students with disabilities in self-contained physical education. *Sport, Education, & Society.* E-publication ahead of print. doi:10.1080/13573322.2020.1817732

Pellicano, E., Dinsmore, A. & Charman, T. (2014). What should autism research focus upon? Community views and priorities from the United Kingdom. *Autism, 18*(7), 756-770. doi: 10.1177/1362361314529627

Pesonen, H. (2016). *Sense of belonging for students with intensive special education needs: An exploration of students' belonging and teachers' role in implementing support.* Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Reich, W. (2010) Three problems of intersubjectivity—and one solution. *Sociological Theory*, *28*(1), 41-63.

Richardson, E. V., & Motl, R. (2019). A narrative exploration of an adapted physical activity space and its impact on persons with physical impairments. *Disability & Society.* doi:10.1080/09687599.2019.1617111

Roulstone, A., Soldatic, K., & Morgan, H. (2014). Disability space, place and policy: New concepts, new ideas, new realities. In K. Soldatic, H. Morgan & A. Roulstone (Ed.), *Disability spaces and places of policy exclusion* (pp. 1-10). Routledge.

Salmon, N. (2013). 'We just stick together': How disabled teen negotiate stigma to create lasting friendship. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 57*(4), 347-358.

Shah, S. (2007). Special or mainstream? The views of disabled students. *Research Papers in Education*, 22(4), 425-442, DOI: 10.1080/02671520701651128.

Shildrick, M. (2012). Critical disability studiers: Rethinking the conventions for the age of postmodernity. In N. Watson, A. Roulstone & C. Thomas (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of disability studies* (pp. 30-41). Routledge.

Shirazipour, C. H., Evans, M. B., Caddick, N., Smith, B., Aiken, A. B., Martin Ginis, K. A., & Latimer-Cheung, A. E. (2017). Quality participation experiences in the physical activity domain: Perspectives of veterans with a physical disability. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise, 29*, 40-50.

Slee, R. (2018). *Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny.* Routledge.

Slee, R. (2019) Belonging in an age of exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *23*(9), 909-922.

Soja, E. (2009). The city and spatial justice. *Spatial Justice, 1*(1), 31-38.

Soja, E. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice*. Chicago: University of Minnesota Press.

Spencer-Cavaliere, N., & Watkinson, E. J. (2010). Inclusion understood from the perspectives of children with disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 27*(4), 275–29.

Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (Eds.) (1996). *Inclusion: A guide for educators*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Tanure Alves, M.L., Haegele, J.A., & Duarte, E. (2018). "We can't do anything": The experiences of students with visual impairments in physical education classes in Brazil. *British Journal of Visual Impairment, 36*(2) 152–162.

Taylor, A. (2020). The metaphor of civic threat: Intellectual disability and education for citizenship. In: L. Ware (eds) *Critical readings in interdisciplinary disability studies. Critical Studies of Education*, vol 12. Springer.

Taylor, A. (2018) Knowledge citizens? Intellectual disability and the production of social meanings within educational research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 88(1) 1–25. doi: https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-88.1.1

Terzi, L. (2005). Beyond the dilemma of difference: The capability approach to disability and special educational needs. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *39*(3) 443-459.

Tomlinson, S. (2017). *A sociology of special and inclusive education: Exploring the manufacture of inability*. Taylor & Francis.

United Nations (2006) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*. Accessed 11th January 2022. Available online at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html.

Vlachou, A., & Papananou, I. (2015). Disabled students' narratives about their schooling experiences, *Disability & Society, 30*(1), 73-86.

Waitoller, F., & Annamma, S. (2017). Taking a spatial turn in inclusive education: Understanding complex equity issues. In M. Tejero Hughes & E. Talbott (Eds.), The handbook of on diversity in special education (pp. 23-44). John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Walker, P. (1999). From community presence to sense of place: Community experiences of adults with developmental disabilities. *Journal of the Association of the Severely Handicapped, 24*(1), 23-32.

Warren, J., & Garthwaite, K. (2014) Biographies of place: Challenging official spatial constructions of sickness and disability. In K. Soldatic, H. Morgan & A. Roulstone (Ed.), Disability spaces and places of policy exclusion (pp. 115 – 129). Routledge.

White, M. I. (2004). Feeling valued at work? A qualitative study of corporate training consultants. *Career Development International, 8*(5), 228-234.

White, M. I. (2005). Tough at the top, even tougher at the bottom: The role of leadership in making staff feel valued. Paper presented at *Rethinking Leadership: New Directions in the Learning and Skills Sector. 27th -29th June 2005.* Lancaster University, UK.

White, M. I., & Mackenzie-Davey, K. (2003). Feeling included at work? A qualitative study of corporate training consultants. *Career Development International, 8*(5), 228-234. doi:10.1108/13620430310498396

Wickenden, M., & Kembhavi-Tam G. (2014). Ask us too! Doing participatory research with disabled children in the global south. *Childhood*, *21*(3), 400-417.

Wilhelmsen, T., Sorensen, M., & Seippel, O. N. (2019). Motivational pathways to social and pedagogical inclusion in physical education. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 36*(1), 19-41.

Woolhouse, C. (2019). Conducting photo methodologies with children: framing ethical concerns relating to representation, voice and data analysis when exploring educational inclusion with children. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, *42*(1), 3-18.