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## Salamanca 25 Years Later: A Commentary on Residual Dialogues of Disability and Diversity

**Abstract:** *The concepts, premises, and promises of inclusive schooling as a global movement crystallized at UNESCO's 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca. Despite their marked influence over the past 25 years, the Salamanca documents also ushered in a set of continuing challenges. Using the documents as a departure point, this paper addresses three main areas: UNESCO's role in erecting an architecture for inclusive schooling; core issues that arose in the Salamanca documents, particularly relating to contentious debates about the audience for inclusive schooling; and continuing issues in interpreting the Salamanca directions.*

**Key words:** *special education needs, inclusive schooling, Salamanca documents, global education governance*

**摘要** (Margaret Winzer & Kas Mazurek: 萨拉曼卡25年之后：关于残疾与多样性余下对话的评论)：1994年联合国教科文组织在萨拉曼卡举行的世界特殊教育大会上提出了包容性教育的概念，前提和承诺作为全球性的一项运动。尽管在过去25年中产生了巨大的影响，但萨拉曼卡的文件也带来了一系列持续的挑战。基于这些文件，本文涵盖了三个主要领域：联合国教科文组织在建设包容性学校建筑中所起的作用；萨拉曼卡文件中提出的核心问题，尤其体现在关于观众对更具包容性的学校教育的争议性辩论中；以及在解读萨拉曼卡路线时遇到的持续问题。

**关键词：** 特殊教育需求，包容性学校教育，萨拉曼卡文件，全球教育政策。

**摘要** (Margaret Winzer & Kas Mazurek: 薩拉曼卡25年之後：關於殘疾與多樣性餘下對話的評論)：1994年聯合國教科文組織在薩拉曼卡舉行的世界特殊教育大會上提出了包容性學校教育的概念，前提和承諾作為全球性的一項運動。儘管在過去25年中產生了巨大的影響，但薩拉曼卡的文件也帶來了一系列持續的挑戰。基於這些文件，本文涵蓋了三個主要領域：聯合國教科文組織在建設包容性學校建築中所起的作用；薩拉曼卡文件中提出的核心問題，尤其體現在關於觀眾對更具包容性的學校教育的爭議性辯論中；以及在解讀薩拉曼卡路線時遇到的持續問題。

**關鍵詞：** 特殊教育需求，包容性學校教育，薩拉曼卡文件，全球教育政策。

**Zusammenfassung** (Margaret Winzer & Kas Mazurek: Salamanca 25 Jahre später: Ein Kommentar zu den Residualdialogen über Behinderung und Diversität): Die Konzepte, Prämissen und Versprechen einer inklusiven Schulbildung als globale Bewegung kristallisierten sich auf der UNESCO-Weltkonferenz über Sonderpädagogik 1994 in Salamanca heraus. Trotz ihres starken Einflusses in den letzten 25 Jahren brachten die Dokumente von Salamanca auch eine Reihe anhaltender Herausforderungen mit sich. Ausgehend von den Dokumenten behandelt das vorliegende Papier drei Hauptbereiche: Die Rolle der UNESCO bei der Errichtung einer Architektur für eine inklusivere Schulbildung; Kernfragen, die in den Salamanca-Dokumenten aufgeworfen wurden, insbesondere im Zusammenhang mit den kontroversen Debatten über das Publikum für eine inklusivere Schulbildung; und anhaltende Fragen bei der Interpretation der Salamanca-Richtungen.

**Schlüsselwörter:** besondere Bildungsbedürfnisse, inklusive Schulbildung, Salamanca-Dokumente, globale Bildungspolitik

**Резюме** (Маргарет Винцер and Кас Мазурек: Саламанкская декларация – 25 лет спустя: комментарий к продолжающимся дискуссиям о специальном образовании и концепции многообразия): Концепции,

условия реализации и перспективы инклюзивного школьного образования как глобального явления обозначились на всемирной конференции ЮНЕСКО по образованию лиц с особыми потребностями, которая состоялась в 1994 году в Саламанке. Несмотря на сильный эффект от принятых положений и мер, ощущавшийся на протяжении последних 25 лет, Саламанкская декларация высветила и целый ряд «устойчивых» вызовов. Анализ документов, утвержденных в Саламанке, позволяет говорить о том, что декларация затрагивает три ключевые момента: роль ЮНЕСКО в создании платформы для инклюзивного школьного образования; ключевые вопросы, затрагиваемые в документах конференции, в частности, те, которые касаются разнополярных мнений о целевых группах, инвolvedированных в инклюзивное обучение; неутрачивающие дискуссии, возникающие при интерпретации саламанкских положений.

**Ключевые слова:** особые образовательные потребности, инклюзивное образование в школе, документы саламанкской конференции, глобальная образовательная политика

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The ongoing movement toward inclusive schooling for students with special educational needs (SEN) is paved with major milestones. One of the most powerful global influences was created at the World Conference on Special Needs Education convened in Salamanca, Spain in June of 1994, sponsored by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in cooperation with the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science. Within the theme of Access and quality, delegates negotiated a paradigm shift that, they claimed, represented the "new thinking" and "a world-wide consensus on future directions for special educational needs education." The core precepts entailed "major reform of the ordinary school" to ensure that children and youth with SEN would "have access to regular schools" and "be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children" (UNESCO, 1994, pp.10, iv, 6). The thinking and directions were gathered into the *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education* and the embedded *Framework for Action*.

Over the past 25 years, the Salamanca documents have proven remarkably influential and enduring on both theoretical and practical dimensions. They codified inclusive principles within human rights, broke new ground by recognizing regular schools as the baseline for educating SEN students, and became a powerful stimulus for worldwide inclusive activity. The central themes occupy a visible and prominent place in the national education plans of many nations. They were particularly endorsed on the European terrain (Meijer, 2010; Takala, & Head, 2017).

Despite the impressive pedigree, the documents tend to be vague and contradictory, replete with interpretative ambiguities that even today confound the practices and attainment of inclusive programs. The most egregious and fundamental problems relate to definitions. The drafters at Salamanca omitted a normative definition of inclusive schooling; an embedded problem concerned the targeted constituency. The description of the population to be served as "children and youth whose needs arise from *disabilities* or *learning difficulties*" (UNESCO, 1994, p.6, emphasis added) created a two-element path that confuses the issue of whether priority belongs to those with disabilities or to the diverse body of students with differences and disadvantages that still create learning problems, unmet learning needs, and marginalization.

Salamanca's message has been both feted as exemplary by researchers and policy makers and meticulously explored from multiple angles. Without denying the profound impact of the agreement, our discussion problematizes the taken-for-granted reputation of the agreement as a panacea and leading voice in inclusive schooling chiefly because the fundamental issues surrounding definitions that came to life at the conference remain largely unresolved and negotiable. The contemporary field sees shared agreement about the ideological charter of inclusive schooling- but this is matched by a corresponding contestation

of what the phrase actually means. Questions related to the disability-diversity conundrum are further ignited by demographic reconfigurations in many countries that have created new social demands on education and foregrounded the practical issue of mounting diversity in the schools.

Previously on these pages we have examined issues that lie at the intersection of disability, diversity, and inclusive schooling and questioned the wisdom assimilating disability into diversity (Winzer, & Mazurek, 2017; 2019). We recognize that attention to diversity is critical in contemporary schools but also contend that disability does not parallel other differences and disadvantages; the project of inclusive schooling must single out disability because fairness demands different approaches, different remedies, and different policies (for a discussion see Anastasiou, & Kauffman, 2012; Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Michail, 2014). The same argument is implicit in this paper. We use the Salamanca documents as the departure point to critically interrogate three broad but intermeshed themes that play into the conversation about diversity and disability. Throughout, we focus on the role of UNESCO in erecting an architecture for inclusive schooling to meet the needs of SEN students and, peripherally here, as part of the Education for All (EFA) tool kit. The paper then explores core issues from the Salamanca meeting: identified policy and institutional choices to propel inclusive schooling as well as the forum of dissenting ideas specifically related to the delineation of the inclusive space as exclusively for disability as opposed to schools to accommodate all. The final section pinpoints issues in interpreting the Salamanca directions that continue to prompt extensive commentary and to shadow inclusive schooling.

## **Delineating a global inclusive agenda**

Inclusive schooling owes its ancestry to the field of special education. However, it is more than old wine in new bottles; the inclusive agenda does not seek to reconfigure special education but adopts sharply divergent theories, principles, and methodology. Different presumptions produce a rights-based education agenda promoted and advanced on the basis of social policy considerations such as participation and equal access, and requiring fundamental changes in attitudes about students, curriculum, pedagogy, and the school organization that determines rules and daily operations.

The Salamanca conference did not mark the retelling of special education. Authoritative work on inclusive schooling was well underway and the foundational philosophy and practices well operationalized by the time the conference took shape in 1994. Varied conceptual blueprints and definitions that pursued greater access to the mainstream but with different theoretical orientations and different cadences developed simultaneously in highly industrialized nations (see Florian, 2014). American scholarship and practice played a singular role in creating the basic concepts and propelling the lexicon of inclusive schooling into public and pedagogical discourse. The US quest emerged from civil rights and was built on the seminal *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EHA, PL 94 142, 1975) and its significant reauthorizations. Measures were anchored in disability. The legislation limits itself to children with disabilities, guarantees such children an appropriate education, and ties all prescriptions for education to the principle of the least restrictive environment (LRE) in which settings can range from general classrooms to more restricted placements such as special schools.

Contemporaneous with American developments, UNESCO took the lead as ideological agenda setter in devising new policy agendas to accommodate students with SEN. Karen Mundy is a key source on the development of UNESCO; Florian Kiuppas on UNESCO developments related to inclusive schooling (Kiuppas, 2014; Kiuppas, & Hausstatter, 2015; Mundy, 1999; 2006; 2016). Kiuppas (2014) explains that within UNESCO a special education unit supplementary to general education oversaw interest in special education. Beginning in the early-1950s, it mobilized knowledge in the field through a series of summits,

policy dialogue meetings, and conferences and, at the same time, set about identifying and documenting examples of innovative practices in different countries (Ainscow, Slee, & Best, 2019; Kiuppas, 2014).

The opening gambits had seen inclusive schooling develop as a rather independent issue largely restricted to the domain of students with disabilities. Coupling inclusive schooling with disabled pupils remained an important part of UNESCO's policy and praxis, but with decreasing viability. With human rights as the touchstone and a focus on social justice, the guiding principles of schools, and the reality of diverse societies, UNESCO began to design the architecture for a new inclusive model with a different policy intent and a wider and more diverse clientele.

In the UNESCO playbook, diversity is an encompassing proposition that pivots on the notion of *all*. Diversity variously refers to common markers such as culture, gender, ethnicity, language, and social class; to different styles and rates of learning; to physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, and other conditions; and to children from disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups, including girls, children from ethnic minorities, those from poor and remote communities, as well as those with disabilities. Of itself, disability is simply another identity representation to be pursued alongside other common markers. The rhetoric of diversity was informed by "recognition of the need to work toward schools that "include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs." In turn, inclusive schooling was seen as key in taking action against structural injustices and inequalities. To UNESCO, the establishment of inclusive schools is "a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, in creating welcoming communities and in developing an inclusive society" (UNESCO, 1994, pp. 3, 6).

The key constituents involved in inclusive schooling were slowly produced, negotiated, and consolidated as part of the UN-UNESCO ensemble. Throughout the 1990s, the concepts and terminology began to regularly appear in UNESCO documents. In the new millennium, benchmarks for inclusive schooling were prominent reference points in the EFA *Global Monitoring Reports* that appeared from 2002 to 2015. The inclusive process was hailed as "a fundamental philosophy throughout UNESCO's programs," characterized as "a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity" and a key strategy to combat marginalization and exclusion to attain and sustain quality education for all. By the close of the decade, diversity was the axiomatic imperative. Discourses now posited that inclusive schooling "supports and welcomes diversity among all learners," not just those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2002, p. 17; 2005, p. 12; 2009, p. 4).

## Polishing the inclusive agenda

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization got underway in 1946 as part of a broader network of UN organizations. UNESCO's mandate to uphold universal education rights and initiate, endorse, and support education activity around the globe was often fraught with contrary views and expectations, punctuated by periods of "turbulent non-growth" (Mundy, 1999, p. 39) that saw key members withdraw. As the 1990s approached, UNESCO was the weakest of the UN specialized agencies in terms of reputation and status and there were "internal fears about losing its status as the lead agency for education" (Singh, 2011, p. 57). Buoyant efforts to strengthen its authority and maintain its integrity lay in a series of international conferences that constructed and defined an impressive global agenda for education. UNESCO was charged with facilitating the implementation of EFA, coordinating UN partners, and maintaining their collaborative momentum.

In the wider history of international education, three major conferences are generally considered drivers of change: Jomtein, Thailand in 1990, Salamanca, Spain in 1994, and Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (Singh, 2011). The same meetings critically advanced the realization of inclusive education. Jomtein shepherded in a productive decade for global education and, to some extent at least, ideas about inclusive schooling took root (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; de Beco, 2018). However, placing the inclusive agenda firmly on the world stage waited on the Salamanca conference in 1994: by UNESCO's own account, Salamanca "proved a watershed for the global agenda" of inclusive schooling (UNESCO, 2018, p. 2). (The Dakar Framework for Action produced in Senegal in 2000 overlooked disability altogether).

## The conference at Jomtein

The first meeting launched by UNESCO convened as the World Education Conference on Education for All in Jomtein in March of 1990. A defining human rights ethos was invoked throughout: delegates were informed by the ideal of education as a human right expressed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) and the matching ideology in UNESCO's Constitution that speaks to "full and equal opportunities for education for all" (Article 1, cited in Mundy, 2016). Against this backdrop and spurred by recognition of the huge numbers of persons excluded from schooling worldwide, the Jomtein meeting produced the *World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990) that crystallized as the Education for All initiatives. EFA advanced the logic of universal entitlement; its ambitious agenda were centrally concerned with issues of participation and access to primary education, including programs, activities, and services. With boundless optimism, the delegates called for "Universal access to, and completion of, primary education (or whatever higher level of education is considered as basic) by the year 2000" (UNESCO, 1990)!

Inclusive schooling or inclusive processes were not referenced in the conference reports. Yet intent is implicit. The articles that stated that every person "shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs" (Article 1) and that "Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system" (Article 3) encapsulated the core ideals of inclusive schooling. The pledges to vulnerable and excluded groups to make society more just and less discriminatory through universal entitlement to education strengthen the link.

## The conference at Salamanca

The World Conference on Special Needs Education that met in Salamanca, Spain, from 7 to 10 June, 1994, hosted more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations, and included senior education officials, administrators, policy makers, representatives of the United Nations, and donor agencies. The generated *Salamanca Statement* and the accompanying *Framework for Action* represented both symbolic and substantive policy.

The documents built on the interplay of multiple contrasting policies, varied political influences, and an intensity of moral commitment. Delegates forged both conceptual and practical alignments with the visions of the Jomtein meeting. They returned to binding international treaties such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN, 1948) to enforce the priority of education as a human right and looked to non-binding UN documents such as the *Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 1993) that placed rights within the context of disability. Policy makers affirmed their commitment to Education for All, embedded the themes of inclusive schooling as "an important

contribution to the agenda for achieving Education for All and for making schools educationally more effective" and considered "the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education" in order to serve students with SEN as "an integral part of national plans for achieving education for all." The drafters confirmed rather than created: they reviewed, interpreted, and utilized resolutions, recommendations, and publications of the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations. There were frequent allusions to "countries or areas that have witnessed progress in equalizing educational opportunities for children and youth with special educational needs" (UNESCO, 1994, Preface, pp.18, 37).

Following considerable discussion, inclusive schooling was adopted as the conceptual preference for educating SEN students (Kiuppas, 2014). Multiple understandings nested within the main theme. The inclusive school where "all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have" was a central expression. Another thread made it clear that the establishment of inclusive schools had to be part of an overall education strategy. Because the principles would fail to take root in traditional education structures, Salamanca's "clear and forceful policy on inclusion" demanded that schools reform and transform in order to address and respond to all learners. A further central theme sought to shift students with SEN from outsider to participant status. By recognizing "the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special needs within the regular education system" they opened the school domain to a much broader population than previously specified. An allied and highly visible stipulation premised general schools and classrooms as the norm or baseline. Traditional modes that routinely separated students were dismissed; the text ruled that "the assignment of children to special schools or sections within a school on a permanent basis should be the exception" (UNESCO, 1994, pp. 11, 8, 12). The *Framework for Action* lent coherence to the ideological base with a purposeful and deliberate set of activities designed to direct inclusive schooling.

Overall, the inspiring pledges in the Salamanca agreement represented a consensus on, and a global commitment to, the ideals of inclusive education. Still, a degree of internal balkanization was present, reflected in the much-debated issue of whether inclusive schooling should primarily attend to the traditional population of those with disabilities or whether the process should respond to the diversity of all learners. Both the Jomtein and the Salamanca documents noted that "The learning needs of the disabled demand special attention" (UNESCO, 1990, Article 3; 1994, p. 4). Sprinkled throughout the final Salamanca agreement are statements that inclusive schooling must be first and foremost dedicated to the traditional population of disabled pupils. For other participants, however, inclusive schooling was best situated within the wider context of social issues and used as a tool to counter the marginalization and exclusion of all vulnerable persons. The explicit social goals downplayed the disability variable and leaned toward diversity-oriented education narratives. To ensure universal entitlement "regardless of individual differences" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 7), advocates held that the inclusive schooling clientele had to expand beyond the boundaries of disability to encompass all those deemed different, disadvantaged, or with unmet learning needs. As we further discuss below, the question of the target population was ultimately unresolved: ideas prioritizing those with disabilities and holistic perspectives run side by side in the final documents.

The Salamanca agreement expresses the moral and political commitment of the international community; it is not binding and lacks reinforcement and accountability provisions. Nonetheless, 93 countries and 20 non-government organizations signed the document and agreed to abide by the ideology and to implement the practical and strategic changes. In the first flush of enthusiasm, international organizations and their representatives, expert committees and ad hoc study groups, governments, ministers of member states, as well as individual experts, collaborated. Many governments indicated that they were

creating new policies, laws, and national plans (de Zaldo, 2000; Kiuppas, 2014). Signatory states pursued inclusive education and carved out some improvements for students with SEN. The agreement attracted widespread approval on the European scene; the emphasis was particularly strong in the group of states that form the European Union. Once European countries positioned themselves in relation to Salamanca, the documents formed "the keystone in the conceptual framework of many country's policies" (Meijer, 2010, p. 2).

After initial bursts of momentum, the grand promises stalled. For example, the appeals to the international community "to endorse the approach of inclusive schooling" and to governments "to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10, 9) were, at best, diluted; at worst, overlooked. European systems took formal decisions in favor of improved access for SEN students but still supported programs ingrained within an ideology sharply at odds with inclusive schooling. In many cases, they implemented inclusive education but continued to house a multilevel architecture of education where inclusive models functioned alongside a robust systems of categorical special education schools.

Trans-Atlantic conversations tended to be sparse. American ideas had held a powerful resonance; their early commitment to inclusive schooling positioned American actors with explicit voice in the inclusive education policy arena. They became fruitful lenders but the US inclusive fraternity restricted its borrowing (see Hunt, 2011). References to Salamanca are scant in the American literature.

## Discussion

Contemporary commentators eulogize the Salamanca conference as "the most important reference for public policies and social debates on special educational needs in most countries of the world;" the documents as "a primary point of departure in research and policy on inclusive education" that continue "to guide the agenda of national and international inclusive policies" (Ainscow, Slee, & Best, 2019, p. 7; Magnusson, 2019, p. 1). This paper similarly underscored how the Salamanca meeting and its decisions are generally hailed as a defining milestone in the development of inclusive schooling. On a less effusive note, however, the Salamanca documents are characterized by loose construction and lack a tight conceptual focus. A literal reading suggests striking ambiguities joined to a vague and confused lexicon that renders the agreement open to contradictory interpretations. In fact, Kuippas (2014) observed that "depending on what standpoint a reader is looking from," that person can interpret the texts "as supporting certain views and approaches more than others" (p. 759). Below we touch on some of the short- and long-term effects of interpretative dissonances. For clarity, we address the dimensions separately although in reality they are intermeshed and interdependent.

**Definitional dilemmas.** It stands to reason that an international document promoting inclusive schooling would provide a definition of the term. Yet even as the final agreement was larded with general observations about who should be included, rationales for inclusive education systems, requisites for inclusive schools, and demands that international organizations and governments adopt the principles, it omitted a satisfactory international working definition. Following, the texts allowed "for a multitude of interpretations of what inclusion can mean" (Magnusson, 2019, p. 21). With multiple interpretations and ways of expressing and implementing inclusive goals, researchers find that implementation is marked by tensions and lack of any real political priority, together with resistance because of lack of coherence and competing interests (de Beco, 2018; Haug, 2016; Norwich, & Koutsouris, 2014).

**Depicting the audience for inclusive schooling.** The Salamanca agreement was the product of various actors who owned different interests rooted in different ideological and pedagogical stances so it is not surprising that a plurality of voices articulated conflicting goals. During the conference negotiations, competing ideas about the target audience surfaced. Some advocates delineated the inclusive space exclusively for disability; other championed schools designed to increase the participation of all students with unmet learning needs. In the immediate aftermath of the conference, "the different ways to interpret the document solidified;" there were disagreements in public debates related specifically to "the definition of the target population of inclusive education" (Kiuppas, 2014, pp. 757, 754). Parties again had to navigate their decision-making through contradictory pressures from different groups of actors pursuing sharply different and non-compatible versions of who should be served by inclusive schooling. UNESCO's organizational unit for special education had focused on special education and people with disabilities throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In post-Salamanca discussions, the unit was urged by those foregrounding disability rights to keep its focus on persons with disabilities. However, they confronted advocacy groups of the social justice persuasion who held expectations to widen the target group (see Kiuppas, 2014). By the year 2000, the policy intent to support diversity and engage all marginalized and disaffected groups became the the main narrative for UNESCO and the education systems that adhered to its policies.

**Widening the inclusive territory.** Shifting the focus of inclusive schooling to a diversity agenda creates a cascade of risks for those with disabilities. For one thing, once disability is considered as simply another identity representation the unique social and education needs surrounding disability may be misapprehended or negated (see Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2012; Anastasiou, Kauffman, & Michail, 2014; Haug, 2016; Winzer, & Mazurek, 2019). For another, researchers hold that expanding the inclusive schooling concept to encompass diversity can create a fundamental misalignment between diversity and disability: it makes the discussion too vague and may set the inclusive education community against the disability community (UNESCO, 2018). Others argue that the broad nature of access stipulated by a focus on diversity may blanket the interests of disabled people. That is, encompassing diversity agendas can render disabled students invisible; disability issues may become secondary or be overlooked in favor of other minority interests (e.g., Kiuppas, 2014; Norwich, & Koutsouris, 2014; Winzer, & Mazurek, 2019).

In a Canadian study, researchers found that official intervention may be reduced or delayed (Winzer, & Mazurek, 2019). Kiuppas (2014) reports that special education was a major component of UNESCO's education program up to the mid-1990s but, as inclusive education gained traction, there ensued a "fading focus on disability in UNESCO's engagement in education." Now "disability plays a less important role in UNESCO's programme spectrum, compared to some decades ago" (pp. 757, 746). Since the year 2000, inclusive education has been more tightly aligned with the EFA project. What had previously been a separate special education track merged into the renamed 'Section for combating exclusion in education' and became more general in its scope (Kiuppas, 2014). By being part of a general education section that encompasses all learners, inclusive schooling shifts from being a very specific focus with a very specific audience to a focus on providing all children with SEN an education.

**Announced policy and daily practice.** UNESCO sets out to direct inclusive programs at the full scope of difference, disadvantage, and disability. Haug (2016) points out that most European countries express an intention to realize inclusive education in accordance with the UNESCO vision. Yet, despite the ambitious mission to welcome and support diversity, "the results of its implementation in practice are not at all convincing" (Haug, 2016, p. 14).



In the global North, whatever the situation and space of practice, inclusive education systematically identifies with those with disabilities. The literature and present practice confirm inclusive schooling as specifically related to the framework of special education and a concern for students with disabilities the dominating perspective (Haug, 2016). An analysis of relevant research databases from 2012, for example, concluded that the dominant use of the term *inclusion* was in relation to special education and disability (Norwich, & Koutsouris, 2014).

## Postscript

Throughout the 1990s, UNESCO led a consortium of agencies in a series of international conferences and summits that revitalized its status as a powerful player in shaping global education policies. The initiatives produced Education for All, an ambitious international program that nurtured aspirations for universal primary education. As well, UNESCO developed inclusive schooling for students with special educational needs as a form of education action. As it polished the principles and lexicon. UNESCO repurposed the inclusive agenda away from its traditional concentration on disabled pupils to new discourses embedded in diversity.

Key conferences at Jomtein and Salamanca played vital roles in constructing and negotiating the boundaries of the UNESCO vision. Jomtein served to launch the globalization of inclusive education and as prologue to the 1994 Salamanca conference. Deliberations at Salamanca were evocative of the Jomtein meeting and closely aligned with the EFA agenda. Delegates created a paradigm shift in both special and general education by explicitly calling for a transformation of school systems so as to include students with special educational needs in general programs. The ideals and practices spread broadly as both objectives and norms and visibly accelerated the worldwide movement toward inclusive education. The foundations and assumptions redounded across Europe; not so much in North America.

The Salamanca documents simultaneously created a series of complex educational contradictions and mismatches that have contributed to informing and shaping the contemporary field. The drafters structured a general understanding of what inclusive education should be, but did not tender a normative definition. Even after 25 years, a universally accepted definition, or any legal consensus about how to define inclusive schooling, does not exist (see de Beco, 2018). Little wonder that the interpretation and implementation varies greatly within and across specific policy contexts and that deepening discourses in the literature dwell on the consequences of missing, multiple, or contested definitions (e.g., Florian, 2014; Goransson, & Nilholm, 2014; Haug, 2016).

Issues circling the profiles of those to be actually served by inclusive schooling simmered before Salamanca, dogged discussions at the conference, and appeared in sharp focus post-Salamanca. The heart of the disputes related to whether the inclusive agenda should favor students with disabilities or make diversity the starting point. At the conference itself, delegates allowed a two-track system; they promoted inclusive schooling for disabled students but simultaneously broadened the concept to accommodate diverse and homogeneous groups in general school systems. While following up the conference, the voices were neither uniform or unambiguous: disputes related to the targeted constituency flared up. In the end, views that endorsed the heterogeneity of learners were accepted as the major narrative.

Two broad trends emerged. On the one hand, UNESCO promoted a diversity agenda that envisaged disability as simply another cultural representation. Collapsing disability into diversity eventually disfavored students with disabilities in terms of reducing official initiatives and urgency. On the other, despite the

powerful message in UNESCO's rendition of inclusive schooling, its institutional embeddedness is questionable. Policy makers may state intentions to adopt the directions but schools tend to retain a preoccupation with the disabled population while inclusive schooling remains strongly embedded within the paradigm of special education.

More than 25 years after the Salamanca delegates met, the fault lines and muddled interpretations continue to confound the inclusive enterprise. There remains much uncertainty about the true meaning of inclusive schooling, the appropriate audience for the processes, how to face the the pressing issue of diversity in the schools, and the considerations necessary to accommodate those with disabilities within the inclusive agenda.

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i Jomtejn's original goals envisioned universal primary education by 2000. This changed to 2010 and then to 2015 in the mid-1990s. In the new EFA cycle that began in 2015, the global architecture absorbed the Education for All agenda into a new set of Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) that were adopted by all 193 member states of the UN. SDG 4 calls for inclusive and quality education for all.

