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# The **six** dimensions of inclusive education:

*supporting practitioners to reduce school exclusion.*

Lynda Kay and Tristan Middleton discuss how to develop inclusive practice in order to help reduce exclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

Exclusion appears to be a subject of ever-increasing concern and attention. Underlying this attention is data from the the Department for Education (DfE) which identifies a comparatively high rate of exclusions for children with SEN. The most recent statistics published by the DfE identify that "the proportion of exclusions accounted for by pupils with SEN has fallen – 45% (down from 47%) of all permanent exclusions and 43% of all fixed period exclusions. Despite this decrease, the prevalence of exclusion amongst pupils with SEN remains alarmingly high.

Whichever mode of exclusion is utilised, ranging from the 'informal' internal exclusion to permanent exclusion, the

message communicated from this sanction is that the needs of the individual with SEN have not been met. This is compounded by the identified negative impacts of exclusion observed within one or more aspects of:

- social relationships
- emotional and mental wellbeing
- academic progress and attitudes towards school
- economic factors
- behaviour and criminality.

This highlights the crucial work needed to develop an inclusive ethos and practice within schools to facilitate meeting the diverse needs of learners and significantly reducing (or eradicating) exclusion.





BIO

### TRISTAN MIDDLETON

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BIO

### LYNDA KAY

Lynda Kay is Senior Lecturer for Inclusion/SEN and Joint Course Leader for the MA Education suite at the University of Gloucestershire. She is Vice-Chair of Directors for Leading Learning for SEND CIC which oversees the work of the NASENCO Provider Partnership. Before joining the University, Lynda's professional experience included primary class teacher, SENCO and Specialist SEN Advisory Teacher.



## INCLUSION – THE CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS AND PRACTITIONERS

The demands made upon school leaders and teachers are many and varied including statutory duties (safeguarding for example), the curriculum, assessment, expectations of progress and attainment, budgetary constraints and ever-increasing complexity and diversity of needs. Anecdotal reports suggest that this is compounded in some areas by increasing difficulties in accessing support from local services. While government policy has advocated inclusion, the competing demands already listed set-up challenges for SENCOs and teachers working to advocate for inclusive practices. Yet another challenge arises from the associations linked by some to terminology e.g. special educational needs can elicit a negative view and low expectations or reluctance to offer flexibility of approach.

These challenges highlight the importance of senior leaders working with the whole school staff and community to explore the differing views and definitions of the terms related to inclusion and SEN and develop a

shared collective understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Having a clear understanding of the theory of educational inclusion offers practitioners a strong base from which to develop their own practice. We have developed a model of a six-dimension framework of inclusive education as a way of supporting practitioners to move their practice forwards.

The six dimensions are all key to an inclusive approach:

### Learning and difference

➤ Learning is about development and change; as we progress in learning we become different, as such, encountering difference helps prepare and support us all for learning.

### Social justice and human rights

➤ The right to an education is fundamental and practitioners who uphold this right are contributing towards this as a form of social justice.

### Empowerment

➤ In order to enable purposeful and relevant

education, learners need to be empowered to be part of planning and decision making relating to their learning.

### Creativity

➤ Creativity can be described as purposeful creation or learning which begins without a defined outcome and enables new and diverse outputs.

### Humanism

➤ This is based on the belief that humans are moral beings and that positive relationships provide the foundation for successful learning and existence.

### Praxis

➤ This is the practice of using theory and research-based evidence to improve practice.

Leaders, such as SENCOs, can use these six dimensions as a way of bringing practitioners together through a shared understanding and purpose which can help to develop a team and provide a shared base from which to make considered decisions about everyday practice.



## CREATING SPACE AND TIME TO PLAN FOR INCLUSIVE APPROACHES

Adopting an inclusive approach to our practice presents us with many challenges, not least because of the dynamic nature of the concept of inclusion. Rather than “trying to define and recreate a polished version of inclusion” (Ekins, 2017), we suggest that having a shared understanding of key principles and beliefs can provide a strong point from which to build inclusive practice. If we share an understanding of the ‘why’ of the things we put in place and we share a desire to make a positive change, then we are well placed to make a positive difference to learners.

It is important for leaders to create spaces for practitioners to explore their own understanding and beliefs related to inclusive education in order to develop a secure base for all members of the team. A safe space is needed where misunderstandings and ‘silly’ questions can be asked and challenges can be made, so that practitioners feel secure in their understanding and can field and respond to challenges. Having a clear and strong understanding of inclusive dimensions, beliefs and principles allows practitioners to develop their own inclusive practice in a creative and collaborative way, with all stakeholders including learners.

When we value difference and empower learners to co-construct their learning pathways, we challenge the idea that there is a ‘right way’ to do things. Good practice ceases to be a model of particular approaches, but a flexible and responsive way of moving in a direction supported by shared values and beliefs. In order to develop these approaches we need spaces to think, discuss and experiment.

Where practitioners are seeking to reduce exclusion, there is a vast menu of interventions and approaches available for practitioners and settings to choose from. The context of the learner and their learning environment will have a significant impact on the success of a chosen approach in reducing exclusion. We suggest that

“It is important for leaders to create spaces for practitioners to explore their own understanding and beliefs related to inclusive education.”



with the strong foundation of belief and understanding, practitioners can make the choices of approaches and interventions through an inclusive framework and consequently experience more success in reducing exclusion.

As a way of supporting practitioners to develop their inclusive approach, in addition to presenting the framework of six dimensions, we have summarised and evaluated a range of approaches and interventions in the context of reducing exclusion. We have also developed a framework of questions for practitioners to use as a way of reflecting on their settings and their own practice. We use the six dimensions to prompt reflection from a range of perspectives including leadership, the learner, and the curriculum. This framework can clarify and strengthen understanding and core beliefs and, as a consequence, support the development of inclusive approaches to teaching and learning.

## CONCLUSION

When planning to meet the needs of children with SEN, practitioners need to consider strengths and difficulties along with an analysis of the physical and social environment. This holistic approach needs to involve the learner and parent or carer, in order to aid a greater depth of understanding of the learner as their life experiences and insights are vital to support problem-solving. This empowering approach can only work if the differences for individual learners are valued within the context of creative outcomes for learning. Where spaces are found or created, to enable practitioners to work together to strengthen their shared understanding and beliefs about inclusive approaches to education, we believe that significant inroads can be made to reduce school exclusion. Our book, *‘Using an inclusive approach to reduce school exclusion: A Practitioner’s Handbook’* further explores these issues.

## REFERENCES

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