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# Principals' views and practices regarding inclusion: the case of Israeli elementary school principals

GILADA AVISSAR*, SHUNIT REITER† and YONA LEYSER‡

*Curriculum Centre, Special Education Department, Beit Berl Teacher Training College, Doar Beit Berl, Israel
†Special Education Department, Faculty of Education, Haifa University, Haifa, Israel
‡Special Education Department, Northern Illinois University, USA


Address for correspondence:
Dr Gilada Avissar, Beit Berl College, Doar Beit Berl, 44905 Israel.
E-mail: Gilada@beitberl.ac.il


## ABSTRACT

Mainstreaming/inclusion is one of the more complex changes on the current educational scene. The goal of this research study was to examine the school principal as the leading figure in implementing inclusion and to characterize his/her role as a change agent. The variables explored were the principal's educational vision and the inclusive practices in school. A sample of 110 elementary school principals in Israel were studied. The Israeli Special Education Law of 1988 and the ongoing regulations issued by the Ministry of Education include provisions requiring mainstreaming. Several different instruments were used. The main findings were as follows: principals were found to perceive the expected social success of mainstreamed students higher than their expected educational success; the severity of the disability affected their perception and how they forecast success; a variety of inclusive educational placements were noted in the schools; several background variables, namely age, level of education and in-service training, were related to principals' views and practices regarding inclusion. The findings are meaningful to the understanding of the effects of inclusion and have implications for in-service training for principals.


## KEYWORDS

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# Northern Ireland head teachers' perceptions of inclusion

Lesley Abbott*

*UNESCO Centre, School of Education, University of Ulster, Coleraine, UK*

Inclusion has been a central educational issue for well over a quarter of a century, with continuing emphasis worldwide on initiatives by governments, Higher Education Institutions and schools that respond to the needs of children and young people with learning difficulties, disabilities or other disadvantage. This paper reports how Northern Ireland head teachers interpret inclusion in the nursery, primary, post-primary and special sectors. Those in mainstream schools showed whole-hearted commitment to the philosophy and practice of inclusion, and could critically examine what they have achieved so far. However, they recognized persistent and varied constraints both within and beyond their schools. Head teachers in the special sector perceived their schools to have a multiple role in providing for pupils with the greatest need, reintegrating those on placement into their regular schools, and offering outreach support to mainstream colleagues. The implications for all aspects of teacher education were identified, for beginning teachers, for more experienced practitioners and for the head teachers themselves. A number of key factors were suggested to make inclusion work.

## Background

Setting the scene for this paper on head teachers' perceptions of inclusion within education requires a definition of the term itself. Despite the widespread and unprecedented popularity of 'inclusion' in official documents, and the apparent shift from the use of integration to inclusion, there has been criticism of the absence of clarity and consistency in defining the concept (Booth, 1999). Booth believed that the 'two linked processes' of inclusion and exclusion had to be kept in mind:

> It is the process of increasing the participation of learners in and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures and communities of neighbourhood mainstream centres of learning.

(p. 164)

*UNESCO Centre, School of Education, University of Ulster, Cromore Road, Coleraine BT52 1SA, UK. Email: L.Abbott@ulster.ac.uk