



## OPEN ACCESS

EDITED AND REVIEWED BY  
Geoff Anthony Lindsay,  
University of Warwick, United Kingdom

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Joseph Mintz  
✉ j.mintz@ucl.ac.uk

RECEIVED 08 November 2023

ACCEPTED 09 November 2023

PUBLISHED 21 November 2023

## CITATION

Mintz J and Norwich B (2023) Editorial: The role of evidence in developing effective educational inclusion. *Front. Educ.* 8:1335386. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1335386

## COPYRIGHT

© 2023 Mintz and Norwich. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

# Editorial: The role of evidence in developing effective educational inclusion

Joseph Mintz<sup>1\*</sup> and Brahm Norwich<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education and Society, University College London, London, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup>School of Education, University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom

## KEYWORDS

inclusion, evidence based practice, special educational needs, inclusive education, evidence informed practice

## Editorial on the Research Topic

### The role of evidence in developing effective educational inclusion

Goldacre (2013) somewhat provocatively laid down the claim that education lags behind other disciplines in terms of its use of research evidence. Given Schon's (1983) critique of technical rationalism across the professions, whether Goldacre's claim is true or not remains open to question, but nevertheless the question of how education is anchored to evidence is very much on the agenda. A range of policy initiatives internationally have focused on how schools and teachers can be supported to engage with research evidence, such as the What Works Clearing House initiative (NCEE, n.d.).

The issue of evidence and practice is thrown in to particular relief in the context of inclusive approaches to special educational needs, given the prevalence of "psychoeducational" models of thinking about diagnostic categories such as autism or ADHD (Mintz and Wyse, 2015). As we noted in the call for this Research Topic, tensions between differing conceptualisations of difference and the role of categorization present questions as yet not fully answered as to the ways in which evidence can and should articulate with practice in this specific domain. Such debates specifically about inclusion and special education intercalate, of course, with wider debates about the place of evidence in education. Notably, Biesta (2017) critiques the now ubiquitous model of "What Works" as being fatally over instrumental in approach, devaluing the crucial place of "practical expertise" in the life of the school and the teacher. Yet science, in its widest sense, continues to churn out academic study after academic study—piles indeed of evidence accumulating every day of the year. From basic science on genetics and neurology through cognitive studies and research on pedagogy and critical perspectives, the march of knowledge continues. It is hard to just ignore. Yet what its precise implications are for teachers, in terms of significance and application remain difficult to ascertain.

In this Research Topic, Daniels et al. focusing on school exclusion, consider these debates and in particular the extent to which a focus on categorizations of research rigor that give precedence to RCT designs in particular fully allow us to capture the complexity the cultural-historical origins and inter play of factors in such phenomena in education. Waitoller et al. similarly problematize the emphasis on quantitative methods in research in inclusive education, particularly noting the importance of taking account of the intersections between disability, race and class. Norwich takes this line of inquiry in a somewhat different direction, noting the importance of recognizing and taking account of value tensions when

coming to judgements about both what is inclusive education and what might constitute “effective” research on inclusive education. He argues that research about inclusive education is not just empirical, it also involves value and norm clarification, a process which has been too often ignored.

Another important issue in this space is that of access. Given the constraints on teachers’ time, both during pre-service education (in most countries), and when properly in the classroom as serving teachers, the question of how teachers might filter and engage with evidence is a live one. Despite the range of initiatives which have sought to address this, such as the research schools network in England (Dixon et al., 2020) and knowledge networks in Canada (Cooper et al., 2017), the question persists: how to get busy and often over worked teachers to effectively engage with any research evidence? Brown et al. report on a survey of teachers and school leaders in England about research informed inclusive practices. One key finding was that perceiving research-use as an activity that successful teachers and schools engage in is associated with more individual-level research use. Also dealing with how research evidence can be matched to meet the needs of individual teachers and schools, Mintz and Roberts focusing on autism education, propose how more use of locally tailored *Theory of Change* models during the adoption of evidence based practices in schools, could make such adoption more effective.

The Research Topic also includes empirical studies reporting directly on and adding to the evidence base on inclusive education. Sharma et al. report on the validation of the newly developed *Parental Perception of Inclusion Climate Scale* which focuses on giving more voice to parents in considering the impact of inclusive approaches to children with disabilities in schools. Staden-Payne and Nel using an interesting approach involving semi-structured interviews and collage making activities, consider factors impeding teacher self-efficacy for inclusion in South African schools. Focusing on the crucial initial stages of teacher preparation and the first few years in the classroom, Specht et al. report on a 4 year longitudinal study of the trajectory of development of inclusive beliefs. A key finding was that student teachers who had in school practicum experiences early on in their programmes were more likely to endorse inclusive beliefs.

The Research Topic concludes with two reviews of the literature. Hassani and Schwab undertake a systematic review of an area never too far from controversy in methodological debates in inclusive education, namely socio-emotional learning (SEL) interventions. Their review focuses innovatively on the use of SEL interventions with children with special educational

needs, and notwithstanding positions taken in other papers in the Research Topic, criteria included use of a control group with pre and post test outcome measures. The authors conclude that across the studies there was some evidence of positive effects for SEL interventions, but that effect sizes were small. Finally, Paul et al. perhaps turning the critiques of Biesta and others on their head, present a meta-aggregative review of *qualitative* studies on the perspectives of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities on their experiences of inclusive education. Their key finding was that young people, when provided with the right opportunities, can show profound understanding of their own strengths and needs which can inform inclusive educational practice.

## Author contributions

JM: Writing—original draft. BN: Conceptualization, Writing—review & editing.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

The author(s) declared that they were an editorial board member of *Frontiers*, at the time of submission. This had no impact on the peer review process and the final decision.

## Publisher’s note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Biesta, G. (2017). Education, measurement and the professions: Reclaiming a space for democratic professionalism in education. *Educ. Philos. Theory* 49, 315–330. doi: 10.1080/00131857.2015.1048665
- Cooper, A., Klinger, D. A., and McAdie, P. (2017). What do teachers need? An exploration of evidence-informed practice for classroom assessment in Ontario. *Educ. Res.* 59, 190–208. doi: 10.1080/00131881.2017.1310392
- Dixon, M., Brookes, J., and Siddle, J. (2020). “Hearts and minds: The Research Schools Network: from evidence to engagement,” in *Getting Evidence Into Education*, eds. M. Dixon, J. Brookes, J. Siddle. London: Routledge, 53–68.
- Goldacre, B. (2013). *Building Evidence into Education*. London: Department for Education.
- Mintz, J., and Wyse, D. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy and knowledge in special education: addressing the tension. *Int. J. Inclusive Educ.* 19:1161–71. doi: 10.1080/13603116.2015.1044203
- NCEE (n.d.). *What Works Clearinghouse*. Available online at: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/> (accessed June 30, 2022).
- Schon, D. A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.