Lecturers' perspective of Inclusive education at Further and Higher Education

Liliana Marić
liliana.maric@um.edu.mt

Abstract

This paper focuses on the lecturers' experiences and reflections on the environmental, educational and social enabling and disabling factors of inclusive education faced by students with physical and sensorial disabilities at Further and Higher Education levels in Malta. Critical disability theory was utilised in conceptualising the social disabling barriers that emerge from the lived experience of individuals while the social model of disability was employed in getting an insight from different lecturers about the oppression created by the socially constructed disabling barriers. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1994), this research revealed that over time, social relationship between different stakeholders, namely, the individual, family, friends, school community and society at large affect the lived experiences of diverse learners in educational institutions whether they are enabled or disabled. This shift is influenced by the extent to which a rights-based approach is adopted. The significance of this paper is to show the salient role of lecturers within a pro-inclusion model of inclusive education consisting of a nested system of intersecting relationships. The findings underline that lecturers have an important role in creating a transformative momentum that impacts the quality of inclusive education both on a philosophical and on a pragmatic level.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Further Education, Higher Education, Disability, Bronfenbrenner*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the lecturers' experiences and reflections on the enabling and disabling factors of inclusive education faced by students with physical and sensorial disabilities at Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) levels in Malta. This research was part of a broader mixed methods inquiry (Tashakkori, Teddlie 2010). The aim of this article is to understand the inward and outward relationship of lecturers within school communities as represented in Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1994). The analysis focuses on the lecturers' perspective who are main stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive

education both in the teaching and assessment components (Shek, Wu 2014). The findings consolidated the salient role of lecturers within the developed pro-inclusion model of inclusive education that stemmed from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

Students' diversity conveys the need to renew the lecturers' commitment to teach all learners regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status and ability (Gordon 2009, Burgstahler 2010a). Thus, a pro-inclusion culture that reinforces accessible and equitable quality learning and assessment practices that respect student diversity and the students' right to education are essential for the implementation of quality inclusive education. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Model encapsulates five types of nested systems. At the epicentre of Bronfenbrenner's taxonomy (Bronfenbrenner 1994, pp. 39-40) there is the "microsystem" that includes "pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations" that a person experiences in settings with specific physical, social and symbolic aspects such as "family, school, peer group, and workplace." One also finds the "mesosystem" consisting of "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings" that a developing person lives in or the "system of microsystems." Additionally, the "exosystem" comprises "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings" whereby the developing person is not directly involved in at least one of the settings. Furthermore, the "macrosystem" incorporates "the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosytems characteristic of a given culture or subculture" while the "chronosystem" adds in the evolution of the external systems over time.

Quality inclusive education calls FE and HE institutions to be proactive rather than reactive in mainstreaming inclusive education. This implies a reconstruction of the 'learning landscape' (Portelli 2010) that involves an evaluation of "the physical architecture, the formal and informal relationships, the processes of teaching, learning and assessment, the deployment of technology and the other factors that combine to shape the nature of the student experience in higher education" (Stevenson, Bell 2009, p. 1). Equity in the provision of quality inclusive education including accessible assessment promotes democracy and social justice that liberate disabled students from being oppressed. Similarly, Portelli (2010) claims that our educational system should apply the principles of democracy by valuing equity over a 'one size fits all' mentality. This would also sustain social justice towards fulfilling the needs of all. Portelli (ibid.) proposes critical open discussions and advocates for the widening of possibilities "rather than an attitude of fatalism and deficit mentality" (p. 1). Additionally, Pinto et al. (2012, p. 2) argue that, "critical democracy necessarily leads to requirements of inclusion and empowerment, with particular attention to those who are often marginalised." Dialogue and collaboration are means to empowerment if those involved position themselves with an open mind towards understanding the reality of others and are ready for change and growth.

Methodology

Titchkosky (2006) considers that the experience of disability is a social inquiry as it extrapolates how a culture includes and excludes disabled persons in daily matters. The interpretive framework of critical disability theory was utilised in conceptualising the theoretical understanding of social disabling barriers that emerge from the lived experience of individuals while the social model of disability was employed in getting an insight from different lecturers about the oppression created by the socially constructed disabling barriers.

'Snowball sampling' was used to enrol eleven full-time academics teaching at the University of Malta for a semi-structured interview (Collins 2010). The selection process was established on their rigour in inclusive education and in the disability sector and on whether they have a physical/sensory impairment. Each interview was approximately an hour long. A "convenience scheme" was applied to recruit eleven members for the Further Education lecturers' focus groups (Collins 2010). The selection process was based on their experience in teaching students with physical/sensory disabilities. Since the group of eleven members could not attend all together, the group was divided into four small groups. To manage the complexity of the data, the number of participants representing the lecturers was kept small, but it was enough to obtain saturation of themes (Creswell 2007). Owing to the small sample of each group of participants, generalisations could not be formulated.

In this study, thematic analysis was carried out following the 'similarity principle' that entailed looking for "commonalities in the data" (Teddlie, Tashakkori 2009, p. 353). Data analysis was carried out manually as this allows one to familiarise oneself with the complexity of the data (Braun, Clarke 2013). During interpretation, meanings of reality from direct experiences of participants in specific contexts at a given time were extrapolated (Cohen et al. 2010). For the interviews with the academics, the process of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 2010) was applied. The focus groups were analysed using "a classic analysis strategy" (Krueger, Casey 2009, p. 118) which highlighted the 'critical incidents' of events, actions or situations that created enabling or disabling contexts influential to the participants (ibid. p. 125). To identify the participants, next to each quote, a code was given, whereby 'Ac' stands for Academic 'and 'Fg' stands for Focus Group. In order to facilitate understanding quotes in Maltese were translated into English.

Findings

This section discusses two themes, namely the politics in the provision of quality inclusive education and the politics in implementing inclusive practices.

The politics in the provision of quality inclusive education

Shek and Wu (2014) deduce that students are grateful towards lecturers who are caring and supportive and their enthusiasm affects the learning process. The academics participating in this research argued that there is a lack of consistency among educators in having a pro-inclusion culture. The educators' motivation, expertise and attitude towards disability influences whether inclusive education is implemented in a positive way:

> *Attitude can be a huge barrier that prevents even physical barriers from being removed. You will find really good examples of inclusion. There is still a significant chunk of not so good examples which need to be addressed. (Alexandra, Ac)*

The academic interviewees indicated that Malta needs to provide quality inclusive education rather than merely placing students in mainstream classes. The challenge is in having educators taking responsibility of all students and providing them with quality education from a rights standpoint. Some participants argued that a charity approach still prevails as inclusive systems are not yet in place. The creation of an inclusive system across the educational system that transposes to employment is underdeveloped:

> *Inclusive education! Maybe on paper we're good, but I don't know in practice. … We still depend on the good-will and charity of people. We haven't arrived at rights yet. At primary and secondary level we moved a lot but at tertiary level we started to dwindle. It is even worse when they come to do the transition to employment. (Veronica, Ac)*

Disabled students as a minority group pose a new 'learning landscape' at FE and HE (Portelli 2010). Inclusive education should not only be equated with the number of services provided, but also with the quality of the services and the type of culture that all stakeholders uphold with regard to the inclusion of diverse students:

> *Disabled people are a minority group. The dominant group do not understand your situation. So it's a struggle. They don't understand that it's the dignity of a person, that people have equal entitlement whatever their needs. (Peter, Ac)*

> *I think that the discourse of the social model has helped. I believe that we haven't yet started to live it. … There are different inclusive systems. You won't need to talk about inclusive education as it is part of it. We made it equal to the amount of services. (David, Ac)*

There was a dichotomy between participants who indicated that out-of-class support is needed and those who expressed that inclusion does not mean

creating structures where students will be pulled out of the mainstream class. Some participants indicated that Deaf students (Deaf to uphold the Deaf culture) (Deaf People Association, Malta 2020) need specialised training. Positive stories of inclusion rely on the educators' commitment to overcome the problems that students face due to their impairment and the environment. The participants agreed that the major benefit of inclusive education is social development which is one of the aims of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006, Article 24):

> We have to be realistic. The social aspect isn't everything. Nevertheless, we have students at university because of inclusion. … I don't believe that the best place for the Deaf child is in a mainstream class 100%. I believe in inclusion, but I believe in maximising the child's ability. (Marianne, Ac)

The academics claimed that to increase the chances for disabled students to complete courses, FE and HE institutions need to widen accessibility. This entails training administrators, lecturers and parents on how they can support students appropriately. The environment and courses need to be designed for a diverse population of students. The Universal Design for Learning framework could instil a paradigm shift towards creating inclusive learning environments (Imrie 2007, Burgstahler 2010b):

> We've moved a lot, but are we really including them or are they placed? We need to put strategies in place, training the parents too. (Rachel, Ac)

> Each one of us should have access to the curriculum so that we learn in the mode that suits us most. (Eleonora, Ac)

The analysis of the focus groups transcripts showed that investment in specialised training such as sign language interpreters and ongoing training to support lecturers in finding ways of how to implement inclusive education is needed:

> There are very few people who offer sign language in classes. There's a great need. If training is done, there could be certain days allocated for it, maybe in September before the students start. (Matthias, Fg)

The members preferred short training sessions that focus on the needs of the students whom the lecturers would be teaching rather than on general instruction that should be part of the teacher training course. Similarly, Golder et al. (2009) reinforce the importance of initial and professional development training in the field of learning difficulties and disabilities for all teachers:

> I think at university, inclusive education shouldn't be an option. Tell me a bit what I have in my class and that's it. (Audrey, Fg)

To reflect integrity and due diligence, the strategies in implementing inclusive education have to be evaluated and monitored by experts in the field of quality assurance and in the respective subjects. There has to be a consensus on the type of support that is available in class. Having learning support assistants/educators or teacher assistants in the class encapsulates a political debate:

> *Another teacher in class with me, I think that I would become confused as a ship sails with one captain. When I had the LSA (Learning Support Assistant), the roles were defined. I'm the teacher and he is helping the student. (Manuel, Fg)*

Keating et al. (2012, p. 254) state that "an educational institution needs to take into account students' learning needs to make assessments more inclusive." This implies "effective communication between students, academic support staff, technical support staff and academic tutors." The participants in this research remarked that methods of assessment have to reflect strategies that enhance and consolidate inclusive education. Participants maintained that assessment controls what and how lecturers teach:

> *Why should the 100% of the mark depend on the two-hour exam? It should be part assessment and part exam. (Rupert, Fg)*

> *As type of assessment, it should be formative. This wouldn't just help disabled people, but everyone and there would be an oral part, written part, and more visuals. (Matthias, Fg)*

The focus group members debated that a pro-inclusion culture renders different stakeholders open to alternative solutions that help students access learning and assessment. It also encourages individuals to question one's beliefs and practices and the status quo of educational institutions and examination boards. The use of technology was regarded as problematic as there is a lack of standardisation in its use and in the training on how different stakeholders can use new technologies that enhance teaching and assessment:

> *Technology always helps out and if you have disabled people, there is a whole range of technologies which can make life easier. (Maureen, Fg)*

> *What we need is to help everyone access learning, using technology. We need to look at the person holistically. (Charles, Ac)*

The politics in implementing inclusive practices

The academic participants revealed that there is a distinction between schooling that refers to the acquisition of qualifications and educating which means personal development towards good citizenship (Rioux 2008). The quality of education at primary and secondary levels influences students' success to further their education:

> *Our understanding of human rights is not yet so strong in terms of that everyone is entitled to respect as a human person. (Peter, Ac)*

> *It should be inclusive schooling not inclusive education because our system does not focus on education if by education we mean that you'll become a better person than you are now. (David, Ac)*

Human rights, democracy and social justice which correspond to the values of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006) were the three pillars that participants considered salient throughout the educational system in terms of inclusive education policy and implementation. There is the need for ongoing investment against an "educational system that creates apartheid among children" (Charles, Ac). This shackles the extent disabled students can reach in FE and in HE:

> *On a philosophical level, we have many people who don't believe in inclusion. You have a level of competence and specialised training which is lacking and few who are truly competent, trained and specialised, but are buried in work. (Charles, Ac)*

According to the participants, student diversity is respected by creating more opportunities at FE and HE levels where students can access learning at their own pace and in the mode that matches their learning style (Giangreco 2017):

> *University is not the only place where you can have lifelong learning. Inclusivity means respecting diversity. (Rachel, Ac)*

It was agreed that the involvement and participation of disabled people is a contributory element in implementing inclusive practices successfully:

> *Disabled students have a good contribution to make. They come with a different point of view of life and a rich experience of interactions that didn't work or that worked despite difficulties. (Marianne, Ac)*

Small class groups were favoured by the participants as they create a learning environment that promotes social cohesion and access to learning. Lyon and Lagowski (2008, p. 1575) signpost that "students in a large-class environment modified to accommodate small learning groups achieve at a higher level using the conventional academic measures of achievement":

I prefer small classes. When it's a small community, they get more help. (Jack, Ac)

The participants stressed that the implementation of inclusive education poses great challenges on a day-to-day basis. They recognised that accessible educational practices for disabled students amongst other minorities is protected by anti-discrimination legislation (Laws of Malta 2000). The promotion of environmental, information and educational access supported by positive attitudes towards persons with specific educational needs are key to enhancing the quality of inclusive education:

The way courses are designed doesn't help those who have a disability. We have to be convinced that people deserve the chances and everyone has his own way and rhythm. We won't have one model of inclusive education. There has to be flexibility. (Alan, Ac)

Collaboration amongst staff, flexibility and adaptability in educational programmes ensure that all students are reached and supported accordingly (Björnsdóttir 2017). Lack of access increases the propensity that disabled students drop out of courses. The Universal Design for Learning framework was regarded to complement inclusive education on a theoretical and practical level:

You are always going to need specific arrangements for specific people. The system, facilities, buildings, educational materials should be based on the Universal Design. (Alexandra, Ac)

Pro-active planning was regarded as crucial to minimise the need for persons to disclose their impairment as the environment, systems and practices would be already accessible:

I don't know what students I have in front of me and if they need support. Even the numbers we have are big. (David, Ac)

The participants indicated that lecturers and other staff need to be supported about developing more inclusive practices from a rights-based standpoint and on different levels (Albertyn et al. 2016):

There needs to be more awareness perhaps among lecturers of what they can do, more awareness of the ADSU (Access Disability Support Unit), allowing recordings and sending notes. (Alexandra, Ac)

Large groups of students and lack of information about students' educational needs hamper the extent to which educators can reach out to students. Distance learning opportunities are needed for those students who would not be able to attend lectures whereas blended learning enhances the quality of inclusive education as it accommodates different learning styles:

With today's technology, if you have someone with a mobility problem, he doesn't even have to come to university if the Moodle platform works well and if we'll have blended learning. (Alan, Ac)

Self-help strategies that disabled students develop to be autonomous learners were believed important (Lifshitz et al. 2007):

Disabled people need to have a sense of responsibility for their own life, not all the time expecting things from people, including fighting for your rights. (Alexandra, Ac)

Participants argued that a cultural change is needed when it comes to the type of support that is to be requested at FE and HE. Environmental accessibility reduces students' dependency on peers or the risk to quit by the first year:

If the campus is not going to become more user friendly, we won't see students with disability who will continue the course up to the last year. (Veronica, Ac)

The academics indicated that persons with activity limitations are more likely to access the curriculum as they need very few reasonable adjustments. Secondly learners with visual and hearing impairment. Individuals with intellectual disability and learning difficulties are further down the hierarchy. The participants agreed that the integrity of the subject and examination boards should be maintained:

We have to ensure that the students get the access arrangements that they need, but the integrity of the examination is retained. (Marianne, Ac)

The focus groups members claimed that the dissemination of information about the students' learning needs was inconsistent. They revealed that medical reports are valued as a means of information to lecturers on the students' abilities and limitations, particularly when it is a hidden impairment (Lovett et al. 2015). Adolescence makes students very sensitive towards disclosing their needs but developing a positive relationship with students was regarded useful as it encourages students to express their requirements openly. However, this support could be inconsistent across institutions (Molina et al. 2016):

There are students who have disabilities that are not so obvious and they don't say anything. You get to know about them during the year. Maybe the problem has to do with adolescence and that they are in a new school. (Maureen, Fg)

Disclosure is very important. When they apply, they'll ask them if they need help. They explain to them that they're not going to be prejudiced, on the contrary. (Dennis, Fg)

The involvement of disabled people in the consultation process prior to entering a post-secondary institution and during the course enhances the quality of the teaching and learning experience:

> *Even giving a voice to the student, that's already helping the student learn more about him or herself. (Christine, Fg)*

Synergy and consultation reduce pressures arising from power tensions between students, lecturers and administrators, and enhances empowerment across stakeholders:

> *We need to improve communication with all the stakeholders. The sharing of information. I do feel isolated. I don't have an idea of what's going on outside here. (Sean, Fg)*

The participants pointed out that the lecturers' difficulty to implement inclusive education also arises from a lack of knowledge and resources when supporting the learning process of people with different educational needs. Although improvisation and trial and error could work, it does not render quality inclusive education. For example when addressing a class with a student with visual impairment, a participant remarked that:

> *At the beginning, I used to catch myself saying, for example, "All of you open page 15," or, "Look at the board." I felt my lack of professionalism to meet her needs, but eventually I tried to cater as much as I could. I think, we ought to be trained. (Rupert, Fg)*

Evidence from this research indicated that dialogue, active participation and collaboration among disabled students, peers and lecturers improve group dynamics as they would become sensitive to the needs and the realities of others. Continuation of school support at home by care givers would reinforce learning and independence. Both students and lecturers have to adapt to each other by going through a process of personal, professional and social adjustment to create a successful experience of inclusive education (Lifshitz et al. 2007). When reflecting upon the group dynamics that could be created between lecturers and students as well as disabled and non-disabled students, a participant pointed out:

> *I'm teaching the same group. She's not part of the group anymore, and the group is not as connected as it was last year. She was an opportunity for other people to practise virtue. (Rupert, Fg)*

The participants remarked that a student should be in mainstream education if it is best for the student but in competitive FE institutions, there is a lot of pressure. Lecturers indicated that they are committed to adapt to the students but the examination system and how courses are designed create limitations. Thus, different

types and levels of support could enhance students' success in an inclusive setting (Armstrong et al. 2010):

> It's not enough to tell the teacher, "Listen you have this student, lead him to this." You have a class of thirty. How am I going to manage? (Carl, Fg)

> We all have a right to education, but as long as no one is suffering. However, if you have a deadline, what type of compromise are you coming up with? I would much rather teach them separately, but at least I know no one is frustrated. (Rupert, Fg)

The focus group members remarked that environmental disabling barriers on campus prevent lecturers from implementing teaching strategies that reflect inclusive education. When the syllabus demands that lecturers organise outdoor activities like fieldwork, the Maltese natural environment creates an accessibility problem:

> He was in a wheelchair. It was difficult for him to come to the fieldwork at Għajn Tuffieħa. I wouldn't just take them to a place like that, at random, I'm restricted myself. (Audrey, Fg)

Discussion

Reflexivity emerged as an important notion in inclusive education as by reflecting on their practices, the participants became conscious of whether they were enabling or disabling the students. The quality of inclusive education also relies on whether the educators embrace a pro-inclusion approach that corresponds to the social model of disability where the onus of disability is on society and not on the person (Shakespeare 2013). In order to make lectures more meaningful, Roberts (2009, p. 46) points out that staff had to make an effort to ensure that there is an "added value" to attending lectures which goes beyond acquiring lecture notes while trying to accommodate the needs of those students who cannot attend. This focus on empowering lecturers is a vital element in creating an inclusive pedagogy (Corbett 2008).

Data analysis showed that when lecturers positioned themselves as learners and showed their interdependence on the disabled students' participation, both experienced growth. Social partnerships amongst different stakeholders such as students, lecturers, administrative and governing bodies are essential in enhancing collegial transformation towards a pro-inclusion culture (Fernie, Henning 2006, Coffield et al. 2008). Social partnerships are also essential to inculcate consciousness about the importance of creating welcoming and engaging campus environments that are accessible to all (Nicholas, Quaye 2009). It is suggested that educational

programmes directed towards the general public and courses within schools targeted towards care givers should be organised to eliminate prejudice against disability and its disclosure.

Evidence reinforced that lecturers have an impact on the quality of the experience of inclusive education provided. However, time constraints, a busy workload and restrictions from examination boards limit the extent to which lecturers manage to create accessible teaching and assessment while also giving individual attention. The analysis unveiled that although lecturers have the power to enable the classroom context, unless they consciously make an effort to be catalysts and to get informed, disabled students would remain merely integrated rather than included. Molina et al. (2016) remark that faculty members are not consistent in displaying appropriate attitudes with disabled students and "in many cases, it seems lecturers feel that curricular adaptations of any kind are a form of favouritism" (p. 1048). Standardisation in the systems across FE and HE in the provision of inclusive education is essential so that disabled persons would not have to rely on the good-will of individuals who give them support on voluntary basis. Lack of training on diversity and disability affects the lecturers' confidence in reaching out to all students (ibid. 2016). Therefore, it is suggested that teachers in training are given ample theoretical background and practical experiences in inclusive education. Organising professional development courses to FE and HE eductors would enable them to feel secure in facing student diversity and to reach out to the students in a way that befits them. For a successful continuum of inclusive education across different sectors, it is essential that the principles of inclusive education would be an integral part of the ethos and the lived reality of each educational institution. This would benefit the students when shifting from one educational institution to another and during the transition period between one level of education and another. Consultation with the respective Access Disability Support Unit would ensure that the right approach is taken in the development of courses, assessment procedures and recruitment of educators.

The data underscored the need of developing more flexibility in the way students can follow courses. These include methods such as blended learning, e-learning or by using real time distance learning facilities. This realisation became more apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Seale (2006) also claims that as much as e-learning can liberate, it can also confine; particularly when issues regarding equity and accessibility are not addressed. With regard to online distance education programmes, Goodrich (2016) suggests that educators should have appropriate training on the Universal Design for Learning in order to design distance education courses that are accessible and that meet the needs of diverse students. The data showed the importance for good quality of life and for one to find a suitable pace of learning. Thus, to be sustainable there have to be different learning opportunities that protect the quality of life of the learners while sharing common foundations based on the pillars of respecting one's human rights, democracy and social justice.

In accordance to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1994) that presents multi-level nested systems, the research conducted revealed that over time, the social relationships between different stakeholders, namely, the individual, family, friends, school community and society at large affect whether the lived experiences of diverse learners in educational institutions are enabled or disabled. This shift is influenced by the extent to which a rights-based approach is adopted. Thus, vis-à-vis inclusive education, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1994) was further developed into a Pro-inclusion model of inclusive education consisting of a nested system of intersecting relationships which is represented in Figure 1 (Marić 2018). As the findings of this research suggest, lecturers have an inherent and central role in creating a transformative momentum within the nested system that impacts the quality of inclusive education both on a philosophical and a pragmatic level.

Figure 1. Pro-inclusion model of inclusive education consisting of a nested system of intersecting relationships. *Source.* Marić (2018, p. 245).
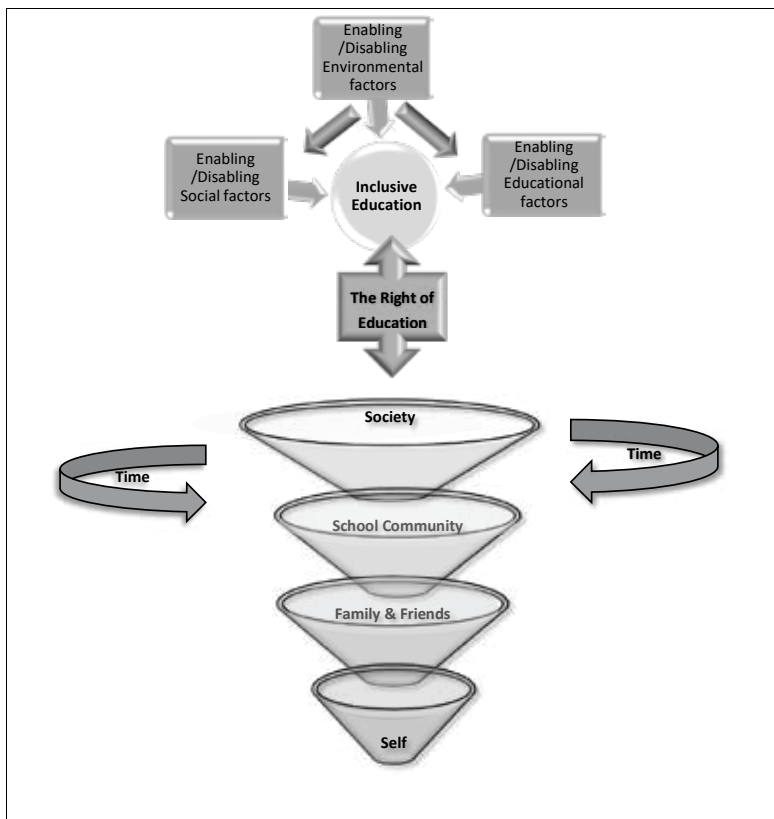
Conclusion

This paper brought to light the lecturers' authentic reflections. The research revealed that development in inclusive education at FE and HE is ongoing and that it is a process of "becoming" that reinforces the principles of an inclusive culture, democracy and social justice (Bhaskar 2007, p. 583, Ainscow et al. 2006). This is a prerequisite since, as Neary and Thody (2009) claim, for a 'learning landscape' to remain engaged on a practical and theoretical level, it should be "constantly reviewed and reinvigorated" (p. 41). Thus, the challenges ahead are daunting, but if there is a collective and consistent political activism to transform the ideology of inclusive education, there is hope. Nonetheless, it is essential that policy-makers value evidence from current research as insightful knowledge that can be utilised to improve current policies and the lived experiences of different individuals. In bridging Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Pro-inclusion model of inclusive education as developed from the transdisciplinary study carried out, it is evident that the lecturers' input is central to the implementation of inclusive education from a rights-based perspective so that learners will have a positive inclusive learning experience at FE and HE levels.

References

AINSCOW, M., BOOTH, T., DYSON, A., FARRELL, P., FRANKHAM, J., GALLANNAUGH, F., HOWES, A., and SMITH, R., 2006. *Improving schools, developing inclusion.* London: Routledge.

ALBERTYN, R. M., MACHIKA, P., and TROSKIE-DE BRUIN, C., 2016. Towards responsible massification: Some pointers for supporting lecturers, *Africa Education Review*, 13(3-4), pp. 49-64.

ARMSTRONG, A. C., ARMSTRONG, C., and SPANDAGOU, I., 2010. *Inclusive education – international policy and practice.* London: SAGE Publications.

BHASKAR, R., 2007. Critical realism and dialectic. In: M. ARCHER, R. BHASKAR, A. COLLIER, T. LAWSON, and A. Norrie, eds, *Critical realism – essential readings.* London: Routledge, pp. 575-640.

BJÖRNSDÓTTIR, K., 2017. Belonging to higher education: Inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities, *Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(1), pp. 125-136.

BRAUN, V., and CLARKE, V., 2013. *Successful qualitative research – a practical guide for beginners.* London: SAGE Publications.

BRONFENBRENNER, U., 1994. Ecological models of human development. In: *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, Vol. 3, (2nd ed.). Oxford: Elsevier.

BURGSTAHLER, S. E., 2010a. Universal design in higher education. In: S. E. BURGSTAHLER, and R. C. CORY, eds, *Universal design in Higher education – from principles to practice.* Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, pp. 1-20.

BURGSTAHLER, S. E., 2010b. Universal design of physical spaces. In: S. E. BURGSTAHLER, and R. C. CORY, eds, *Universal design in higher education – from principles to practice.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 187-197.

COFFIELD, F., EDWARD, S., FINLAY, I., HODGSON, A., SPOURS, K., and STEER, R., 2008. *Improving learning, skills and inclusion – the impact of policy on post-compulsory education*. London: Routledge.

COHEN, L., MANION, L., and MORRISON, K., 2010. *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). London: Routledge.

COLLINS, K. M. T., 2010. Advanced sampling designs in mixed research: Current practices and emerging trends in the social and behavioural sciences. In: A. TASHAKKORI, and C. TEDDLIE, eds, *Mixed methods in social and behavioural research.* London: SAGE Publications, pp. 353-378.

CORBETT, J., 2008. Linking theory with practice. In: P. CLOUGH, and J. CORBETT, eds, *Theories of inclusive education – a student's guide.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing, pp. 45-169.

CRESWELL, J. W., 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design – Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

DEAF PEOPLE ASSOCIATION (MALTA), 2020. *Statute of Deaf People Association (Malta).* [Online] Available: http://www.deafmalta.com/uploads/1/3/4/9/13498462/dpam_signed_statute_2020_-_english.pdf [May 15, 2022]

FERNIE, T., and HENNING, M., 2006. From a disabling world to a new vision. In: M. ADAMS, and S. BROWN, eds, *Towards inclusive learning in higher education.* London: Routledge, pp. 23-31.

GIANGRECO, M. F., 2017. Expanding opportunities for students with intellectual disability, *Educational Leadership*. 74(7), pp. 52-57.

GOLDER, G., JONES, N., and QUINN E. E. 2009. Strengthening the special educational needs element of initial teacher training and education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36(4), pp. 183-190.

GOODRICH, M. A., 2016. Improving distance education for disabled students: Making the grade, *Distance Learning*. 13(1), pp. 15-20.

GORDON, D. T., 2009. School reform: are we just getting started? In: D. T. GORDON, J. W. GRAVEL, and L. A. SCHIFTER, eds, *A policy reader in Universal design for learning.* Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, pp. 19-33.

IMRIE, R., 2007. From universal to inclusive design in the built environment. In: J. SWAIN, S. FRENCH, C. BARNES, and C. THOMAS, eds.), *Disabling barriers – enabling environments* (2nd ed.) London: SAGE Publications, pp. 278-284.

KEATING, N., ZYBUTZ, T., and ROUSE, K., 2012. Inclusive assessment at point-of-design, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 49(3), pp. 249-256.

KRUEGER, R. A., and CASEY, M. A., 2009. *Focus groups – A practical guide for applied research* (4th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

LAWS OF MALTA., 2000. *Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act* (CAP. 413). [Online] Available: http://docs.justice.gov.mt/lom/legislation/english/leg_vol_13/chapt413.pdf [May 15, 2022]

LIFSHITZ, H., HEN, I., and WEISSE, I., 2007. Self-concept, Adjustment to Blindness, and Quality of Friendship Among Adolescents with Visual Impairments, *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*. 101(2), pp. 96-107.

LOVETT, B. J., NELSON, J. M., and LINDSTROM, W., 2015. Documenting hidden disabilities in higher education: Analysis of recent guidance from the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 26(1), pp. 44-53.

LYON, D. C., and LAGOWSKI, J. J., 2008. Effectiveness of facilitating small-group learning in large lecture classes: A general Chemistry case study, *Journal of Chemical Education*, 85(11), pp. 1571-1576.

MARIĆ, L., 2018. *Inclusion within further and higher education: the experience of young people with physical and sensorial disabilities.* Ph.D. thesis, Malta: University of Malta.

MOLINA, V. M., PERERA RODRÍGUEZ, V. H., MELERO AGUILAR, N., COTÁN FERNANDEZ, A. and MORIÑA, A., 2016. The role of lecturers and inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs.* 16(1), pp. 1046–1049.

NEARY, M., and THODY, A., 2009. Learning landscapes: Designing a classroom of the future. In: L. BELL, H. STEVENSON, and M. NEARY, eds, *The future of Higher education – Policy, pedagogy and the student experience.* London: Continuum, pp. 30-41.

NICHOLAS, A. H., and QUAYE, S. J., 2009. Beyond accommodation – Removing barriers to academic and social engagement for students with disabilities. In: S. R. HARPER, and S. J. QUAYE, eds, *Student engagement in Higher education.* London: Routledge, pp. 39-60.

PINTO, L. E., PORTELLI, J. P., ROTTNAM, C., BARRETT, S. E., and MUJUWAMARIJA, D., 2012. Social justice: The missing link in school administrators' perspectives on teacher induction, *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy.* pp. 129, 1-22.

PORTELLI, J. P., 2010. *Inclusive education.* [Online] Available: http://www.academia.edu/397579/Inclusive_Education

RIOUX, M., 2008. Disability, citizenship and rights in a changing world. In: C. BARNES, M. OLIVER, and L. BARTON, eds, *Disability studies today.* Malden: Polity, pp. 210-227.

ROBERTS, H., 2009. Listening to disable students on teaching, learning and reasonable adjustments. In: M. FULLER, J. GEORGESON, M. HEALEY, A. HURST, K. KELLY, S. RIDDELL, H. ROBERTS, and E. WEEDON, eds, *Improving disabled students' learning – experiences and outcomes.* London: Routledge, pp. 38-59.

SEALE, J. K., 2006. *E-learning and disability in higher education – Accessibility research and practice.* London: Routledge.

SHAKESPEARE, T. 2013. The social model of disability. In: L. J. DAVIS, ed, *The disability studies reader*, (4th ed.). London: Routledge, pp. 214-221.

SHEK, D. T. L., and WU, F. K. Y., 2014. The role of teachers in youth development: Reflections of students, *International Journal on Disability and Human Development*, 13(4), pp. 473–480.

SMITH, J. A., FLOWERS, P., and LARKIN, M., 2010. *Interpretative phenomenological analysis – Theory, method and research.* London: SAGE Publications.

STEVENSON, H., and BELL, L., 2009. Introduction – Universities in transition: Themes in higher education policy. In: L. BELL, H. STEVENSON, and M. NEARY, eds, *The future of higher education – policy, pedagogy and the student experience.* London: Continuum, pp. 1-16.

TASHAKKORI, A., and TEDDLIE, C., 2010. Epilogue – Current developments and emerging trends in integrated research methodology. In: A. TASHAKKORI, and C. TEDDLIE, eds, *SAGE handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioural research* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications, pp. 803-826.

TEDDLIE, C., and TASHAKKORI, A., 2009. *Foundations of mixed methods research*. London: SAGE Publications.

TITCHKOSKY, T., 2006. *Disability, self, and society.* London: University of Toronto Press.

UNITED NATIONS., 2006. *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. [Online] Available: http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf [May 15, 2022]

Disclaimer: Any opinions expressed by the author are my own and do not represent the point of view or opinion of the institutions to which the authors are affiliated.