An amalgam of ideals – images of inclusion in the Salamanca Statement

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ABSTRACT

The Salamanca Statement is a primary point of departure in research and policy on inclusive education. However, several problems have surfaced in the 25 years since its publication. In particular, several different interpretations of the concept of inclusive education and its enactment in practice have arisen. For instance, the definition of the pupil groups in focus varies greatly. There are also varying definitions of the importance of pupil-placement, when it comes to organisation of inclusive education. Using a theoretical framework combining Bacchi’s [1999. Women, Policy and Politics. The Construction of Policy Problems. London: Sage Publications] poststructural policy-analysis and concepts from Popkewitz [2009. “Curriculum Study, Curriculum History, and Curriculum Theory: The Reason of Reason.” Journal of Curriculum Studies 41 (3): 301–319. doi:10.1080/0022027090277021], this article illustrates that The Salamanca Statement allows for a variety of interpretations of inclusion. As a policy-concept, inclusion encompasses an amalgam of political ideals, including welfare-state ideals where education is viewed as a public-good, as well as market-ideals of education as a private-good. Policies of inclusion also define the desired citizen, through categories of disadvantaged children, the ones excluded but to be included for their own good as well as for the good of the future society. The conclusions are that researchers and policy-makers should elucidate what they mean by inclusion with for instance moral- and practical arguments rather than vague references to The Salamanca Statement.

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Introduction

The scope and power of international agencies and supra-national organisations to formulate and influence national educational policy continues to grow (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Waldow 2009). When it comes to the field of special education, one of the most important international policy initiatives came through UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994). The statement was signed by 92 nations at the time and has been adopted by several nations and organisations since, and it was an important initiative...
to bring children with disabilities to the fore of education policy on an international scale (Hunt 2011). Through The Salamanca Statement, the ideal of inclusive education was not only introduced as a political goal to strive for but in fact became a global policy vision (Pijl, Meijer, and Hegarthy 1997). As many other positively connoted concepts, inclusive education is commonly nominally accepted (Nilholm 2006) and The Salamanca Statement is often used as a point of departure in both research, policy and practice. However, the implementations, interpretations and definitions of the concept vary greatly both in research and in practice, between countries and even within them (Amor et al. 2018; Artiles et al. 2006; Göransson and Nilholm 2014; Nilholm and Göransson 2017). This is not least due to the fact that different contexts allow for different understandings and that international policies have to be adapted to the existing policy environment of each specific country (Magnússon, Göransson, and Lindqvist 2019; Miles and Singal 2010). Thus, different actors are likely to be supporting different arrangements and interpretations of inclusive education.

With Ball’s (1993) definition of policy as a point of departure, this can be expected as policy is a mixture of political compromises, containing contradictions and unclear prioritisation that have to be interpreted and enacted on both the national and school level (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). It can therefore be argued that inclusive education develops in relation to other education policies on different levels of education systems limiting available options for action (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Clark, Dyson, and Millward 1998; Magnússon, Göransson, and Lindqvist 2019). Hence, national and international education policies make certain processes more likely to occur than others (Lundgren 1999), affecting the interpretation and enactment of specific policy ideals, such as inclusive education. The difficulty to realise inclusive education in practice is therefore unsurprising given that it is a political ideal to be fulfilled in vastly different settings with varying resources and organisational traditions.

The aim of this article is to illustrate that the malleability of inclusive education is not only a matter of local interpretations but also a matter of design. The attention is placed on contradicting political ideals and goals as well as the room for interpretations within The Salamanca Statement itself, using a framework of poststructural policy analysis (Bacchi 1999; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) and theoretical metaphors from Popkewitz (Popkewitz 2009; Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004).

In other words, I intend to focus on inclusive education as a policy ideal of education that encompasses different and, in some cases, contradictory aspirations for the structure and organisation of education, and specific ambitions for the future society. The article proceeds in the following manner: first, I will outline the theoretical points of departure as well as the analytical tools and approach. I will then refer to previous reviews of how inclusive education appears in research. In my third step, I present the analyses of The Salamanca Statement. Finally, I will summarise the argument and draw some conclusions about the implications of this article for future research and policies.

**Theoretical points of departure**

Education systems are organised through a complex weave of international and national agreements and legislations, regulations, curricula, as well as local plans and rules, structuring the education system from the organisational level to the level of everyday practice. These policy texts tell us a great deal about the political intentions and ideas about
education, its aims, implementation and priorities (Apple 2004). A policy of education can therefore be seen as a ‘theory’ of education and thus inherently political as it inevitably concerns the distribution of resources, power and representation within the social field of education (Apple 2004). In this article, policies are defined as statements about practice, ‘intended to bring about idealised solutions to diagnosed problems’ (Ball 1990, 26). As they are intended to influence practice, they also define the relationships between different actors, for instance between the governing instances of education (e.g. state, municipality, and potential private actors) and between the individual and the state. Therefore, policies contain more or less implicit assumptions about how pupils are to become citizens of and for society, what type of citizens are to be formed through education, and, consequentially, what society is supposed to be constructed (Popkewitz 2009).

Political ideas behind policies are influenced by economic fluctuations and ideological issues on societal level, which differ both over context and time (Apple 2004). Policies are therefore products of compromises between several political and non-political actors on different levels (Ball 1993) often containing contradicting goals that schools must find ways to enact (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). Policy can thus be seen as being in a state of constant becoming, being both contested and interpreted by those that initiate and write policies, by the practitioners that are to implement the policy, and finally by external actors that form views on policy and practice. Policies therefore exist in different forms, as formal documents such as laws and regulations on national and international levels, local governing plans or documentations of bureaucratic procedures, as well as less formal documents such as reports, contracts, summaries of statistics, and even speeches and statements (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016).

The analysis in this article uses a two-pronged approach. Primarily, I lean on concepts from Thomas Popkewitz (Popkewitz 2009; Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004; Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2006). Popkewitz’s notion of ‘reason’ is useful to illustrate functions of policy and education reforms. ‘The ‘reason’ of schooling embodies a style of comparative thought that differentiates, distinguishes and divides’ (Popkewitz 2009, 303 emphasis in original). There is thus a political aspect to the ‘reason’ of schooling, embedded in the formulation of the pupil and the future citizen, as for instance as the ‘problem-solver’, ‘lifelong learner’, the ‘entrepreneur’, or as the ‘disadvantaged’. These concepts formulate ‘not only who the child is but who the child should be’ (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004). In other words, policy both defines the desirable pupil, as well as a vision of the future citizen.

However, aside a prediction of the future, any definition proposed of the desired future citizen invokes an embedded conceptual opposite. Popkewitz uses examples that are quite relevant for the field of special education and inclusive education, i.e. the notion of ‘all children’ as in ‘all children can learn’ (Popkewitz 2009) and the notion of ‘no child left behind’ (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004). Popkewitz’s argues that policy encompasses a double gesture, reproducing inequality in its desire and ambition for equality. By formulating the notion of ‘all children’ as lifelong learners, the child that does not belong to ‘all children’, and who is thus problematic for the schooling system, is also defined within the notion. In this case, it is in terms of ‘diagnosis of the relation of social inclusion and exclusion through comparing the qualities of the child who stands as different from the lifelong learner, the human kind of the disadvantaged or at-risk child’ (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004, 237). In other words, there is a contradictory element to any form of policy and reform that aims to increase equality and reduce arbitrary exclusion as they also ‘construct
human kinds’ or ‘making of people’ either wished for or seen as problematic if they do not fit the categories constructed and requested.

This leads us to another concept of importance for this article, ‘salvation themes’. Salvation themes further illustrate the ambition of amending the society of the future contained in policy, to cite at length:

Policies and research about school reforms in both the European Union and the US embody salvation themes about the saving or delivering of the nation through the education of the child. (…) Reforms speak of the future of democracy, equality and economic progress through the local and individual participation that is managed by the state. (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004, 234)

While the quote above is specifically about education reforms, it is relevant for policy in general as reforms are simply alterations of policy to communicate desired means and ends. These salvation themes can revolve around insuring the participation of particular groups of disadvantaged citizens, in a society striving for social justice, and measures to that degree. Thus, ambitions create a ‘learning society’, ‘a knowledge society’ or even an ‘internationally competitive’ society, that are formulated through the policy goals of using education to prepare pupils for participation within these societies. The qualities the school systems are intended to develop and foster, articulated in policies, are devices to ‘… order and classify conduct’ and therefore ‘… practices of governing what the child should become’ (Popkewitz 2009, 304).

While Popkewitz provides concepts to understand and interpret elements of the analysis here, the second prong is a theoretical tool for structuring the analytical procedure, inspired by Bacchi’s ‘What is the Problem Represented to be?’ or ‘WPR’ (Bacchi 1999; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). The WPR method is particularly useful when analysing problematisations that are (more or less explicitly) expressed in policy documents (e.g. Isaksson and Lindqvist 2015; Magnússon, Göransson, and Lindqvist 2019). The manner in which an issue is presented will affect the understanding of the issue. Thus, the formulation of problematisations will affect our understanding of the problem as well as of the potential solutions that can (or cannot) be used to amend it (Bacchi 1999). Bacchi suggests a set of six questions to identify and evaluate problems and solutions in policies. By raising the problems and solutions, both the underlying assumptions and the political ideals behind them are critically examined. However, due to space I have chosen to use only three questions in this article, adapted from Bacchi and Goodwin (2016):

- What problems appear in the texts analysed?
- How are they prioritised?
- What solutions are suggested to amend the problems?

The representation of problems can be seen as the combined answer to how the formulation of the problems and solutions are presented. Thus, the distinction between the ‘presentation’ of a problem and a ‘representation’ of it lies in the combined analysis of the questions above. By combining Bacchi’s questions with the conceptual framework of Popkewitz, the analysis can illustrate both a conceptual complexity as well as contradictions. Thus, this is more of an in-depth analysis of a single policy document, rather than a broad analysis, that illustrates some of the assumptions underlying
inclusion (and exclusion) as a political problem and discusses the theoretical consequences for inclusive education.

**Inclusive education in research**

Some of the conceptual complexity of inclusive education can be due to the concept stretching over several different levels of application. First of all, it is a policy phenomenon with international, national, regional and local implications. Second, it is a contested and diverse field of theoretical and empirical research. Finally, it is a matter of the organisation of education and educational practice. For the aims of this article, the two first levels are of most interest. In line with the theoretical section above, inclusive education is seen here as an education ideology, constituted of particular visions of education. As such, it embodies distinct normative beliefs about the purpose, as well as the content and organisation of education. However, inclusion as a field of research reflects neither a single or homogeneous ideology, but a range of understandings that vary greatly both in theory and in practice (Avramidis and Norwich 2002; Göransson and Nilholm 2014). Within the field of research, inclusion has several different conceptualisations, sometimes not explicitly stated.

Inclusive education contains several fields of tension. First of all, there is the tension concerning the question of who is in focus, i.e. what pupil groups are supposedly to be ‘included’, or seen as currently excluded (Florian 2008; Hansen 2012; Nilholm 2006). This also pertains to a tension that regards the genealogical relationship between inclusive education as a political project and special education (Magnússon 2015). Some researchers argue that identifying educational difficulties and the labelling of pupils is simply a step towards more or less explicit organisation and practise leading to exclusion (e.g. Haug 1998; Vislie 2003; Thomas and Loxley 2001). As long as educational difficulties are viewed as results of individual factors rather than contextual or organisational factors, marginalisation of vulnerable pupil groups will continue (Skrtic 1991; Ainscow 1998). This would be a radical questioning of the legitimacy of special education as a field of research and practice, and hence a call for inclusive education as something both distinct and different from special education (c.f. Magnússon 2015). On the other hand, there are researchers who argue that inclusive education, as a political project, should specifically focus on SEN pupils (e.g. Kiuppis 2014; Miles and Singal 2010), to ensure that these groups are not rendered invisible within political projects emphasising ‘all’ pupils. This would be of particular importance in countries where access to education is limited in general and for SEN pupils in particular (Miles and Singal 2010).

Additionally, Kiuppis (2014) argues from a historical perspective that there is value in focusing on SEN-pupils within the framework of inclusion as the project of inclusive education, as coined in The Salamanca Statement, was a project distinct from Education for all (UNESCO 1990). Inclusive education was formulated, in other words, with its roots firmly placed in special education, a connection Kiuppis maintains should be acknowledged. Due to historical developments, however, the meaning of inclusive education has become more encompassing, increasingly focusing on the notion of creating inclusive education for ‘all children’, the focus shifting from pupils with disabilities and becoming more akin to the project of Education for all (Kiuppis 2014; Miles and Singal 2010). An example of this explicit widening of the pupil group in focus of the term can be seen in for instance
Hope and Hall (2018) where the meaning of inclusion is discussed with the primary focus on the experiences of students identifying as LGBTQ in a school specifically set up to accommodate and affirm that group of students. Therefore, inclusion has increasingly become a political tool to acknowledge the situation of different disadvantaged groups and encompassing different political philosophies, stemming from both individualist and collectivist notions of democracy (Engsig and Johnstone 2014).

The second field of tension the organisation of inclusion. In particular, the notion of placement and mainstreaming are a constant matter of dispute in research. Several researchers have argued that inclusive education ought not to be reduced to the placement of the pupils (Artiles et al. 2006; Ferguson 2008; Haug 1998; Slee 2008; Thomazet 2009; Vislie 2003). It has also been argued that ‘mainstreaming’, i.e. the placement of SEN pupils in regular classrooms, leads to a reproduction of exclusion if not accompanied by other organisational and pedagogical measures (Emanuelsson 2001; Haug 1998; Slee 2011; Vislie 2003). However, recent reviews of research literature have indicated widely different interpretations of the organisational conception of inclusion. For instance, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) noted four types of inclusive education within the most frequently cited research literature:

1. focus on the placement of SEN pupils in regular classrooms (mainstreaming);
2. focus on social and academic needs of SEN pupils;
3. focus on the social/academic needs of all pupils;
4. focus on ‘creating communities’.

Göransson and Nilholm (2014) noted that the definitions were often implicit in the articles reviewed and in some cases varied within individual articles. In a later article, Nilholm and Göransson (2017) identified a disparity in definitions of inclusion between different types of research articles. Articles reporting empirical data often had a placement-definition of inclusion, the first definition mentioned above, whereas theoretical and ‘positional papers’ (representing a normative position and/or argumentative evaluative position) had more broad definitions of inclusion. These results were recently confirmed to a degree in a more quantitatively encompassing review of English and Spanish speaking articles on inclusive education (Amor et al. 2018). This conceptual confusion and division between different types of research may be seen as a serious challenge for inclusive education as a research field (Göransson and Nilholm 2014; Nilholm and Göransson 2017; Amor et al. 2018), but also as a political project which lacks a common goal that is more specifically formulated.

Findings

As mentioned above, The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) was the official launching of inclusive education as an international policy project and is as such an almost obligatory reference in both empirical and theoretical research on inclusion. While its history is well documented, it is rare to see in-depth analysis of its contents. The Salamanca Statement is structured in two main sections: first, the Statement itself proclaiming the points of departure and ambitions, and then ‘The Framework for Action on Special Needs Education’, which includes an introduction and three additional overarching chapters. The
first chapter, following the Introduction is an ideological proclamation called ‘New Thinking on Special Needs Education’ and illustrates a new view on the need for special support. The second chapter is ‘Guidelines for Action at the National Level’. The third and last chapter of The Framework, is called ‘Guidelines for Action at the Regional and International Level.

**The representation of problems**

The Statement is ambiguous when it comes to formulating specific problems to be amended (c.f. Bacchi 1999). Rather, it provides several suggestions of organisation and practice. Hence, one has to work backwards to the problem the suggestions are intended to amend. To begin with, the second article of The Salamanca Statement is worth citing at length and to use as a point of departure:

We believe and proclaim that:

- every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a childcentred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO 1994, article 2).

The first two points can be seen as pointing out a direction that viewing education as a right, something that ‘the individual child’ is entitled to have both access to, and to succeed within. The child is also viewed as a unique subject. Both of the first two points are thus about all children, and the demand is stated in the third point that the organisational features and structures of the education systems must take these differences into account. The third point, however, points out the specific pupil group in focus for this project, namely ‘children with special educational needs’ and the demand is made that they should have access to regular schools and pedagogies that meet their needs.

Already here, the tension in the focus of the Statement becomes visible – i.e. it both focuses on ‘all pupils’ and specifically pupils with disabilities, this will be developed further below. An additional tension is also visible, i.e. the organisational features of inclusion. The points above both claim that educational organisation must take the individual’s needs and characteristics into account, as well as that ‘regular’ schools are to be the place for education using ‘childcentered pedagogies’. Hence, here a normative position is stated about the placement and teaching of pupils, while at the same time preserving an opening for variations. At least from a hypothetical point of view, it could be argued that individuals may exist that need specific educational provision and pedagogies alternative to those suggested here. These tensions become even more clearly articulated in later
chapters of the document, in particular in the chapters that sketch out the framework for action to achieve these goals.

**Political dimensions – the individual and the society**

However, it is worthy to delve deeper into the last point in the quote above:

regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

This contains several different threads. First, the empirical claim that regular schools with inclusive orientation are ‘the most effective means’ to achieve all (or any) of these goals are still disputed 25 years after the Statements publication (e.g. Göransson and Nilholm 2014). Second, this is an argumentative point, giving reasons for why inclusive education is a good thing. These arguments are constructed from moral imperatives, pertaining to the qualities of individuals (‘combating discriminatory attitudes’), following an economic rationale and terminology (‘effective education’ and improvement of ‘efficiency’ and ‘cost-effectiveness’) in order to construct a future society in utopian terms (the building of ‘inclusive society’ and ‘creating welcoming communities’). This last aspect constitutes the overarching salvation theme of The Salamanca Statement (Popkewitz 2009).

Making education inclusive is not only the ends of the statement, but also the means to create a society with specific characteristics populated by citizens with specific moral values. In other words, aside establishing a new paradigm of special education under the name of inclusive education, The Salamanca Statement also constructs the future, the society and the citizen and resonates with the pedagogical paradigm in which cosmopolitan ideals of education is perpetuated (c.f. Popkewitz 2009).

Here, a tautological argument links the betterment of society and the betterment of individuals in a perpetual cycle, in ‘... narratives of social or economic progress and the revitalization of democracy that will bring personal betterment’ (Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2006, 436). For instance, The Salamanca Statement explicitly expresses that the purpose of inclusive education has implications outside of the educational context. Inclusive education is linked to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), where the purpose of education is stated to be: ‘the full development of the human personality’ and to ‘promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups’ (article 26). Education is explicitly viewed as a public good and inclusive education is seen as an expression of a vision ‘inspired by a humanistic vision of education and development’, whereas inclusive education is seen as a ‘crucial step to develop an inclusive society’ (UNESCO 1994, article 3). These ideas are in line with a collectivist view on society, where the participation in schooling of a certain character is intended to shape a better and more cohesive society in the future.

However, notions of other political ideologies appear as well. For instance, inclusive education is connected to education for all and quality of education and it is argued that inclusion has relevance for future employment, the fulfilment of the individuals’ potential and the possibilities to make good choices in the future. Further, pupils are to
be able to influence their school situation, and curricula and teaching are to be adapted to their needs and prerequisites. The Salamanca Statement defines parents as ‘privileged partners’ who are to be given the opportunity to participate and influence their children’s education, as well as be ‘accorded the choice of education for their children’ (UNESCO 1994, article 60).

These are all iterations of liberal political ideology in which the individual citizens is to be responsible for their own well-being, and to be able to act, choose and make decisions about their own good and the good of their families (article 56). Education can thus be deduced to be a matter of private good. Here again, the link between the betterment of the individual is connected to the betterment of the society, both on moral grounds, as education should increase social cohesion and justice, as well as in economic terms as it is seen as an effective and efficient method with great advantages for both families and societies (e.g. articles 2; 33, 53, 70).

**Who is in focus? – the making of people through inclusion and exclusion**

As mentioned above, as formulated in The Salamanca Statement, the political project of inclusion has its roots firmly in special education, it is even included in its title. While The Salamanca Statement suggests a ‘New thinking in Special Needs Education’, the conception of children with disabilities, learning difficulties and disadvantages occurs several times and is thus clearly a point of departure for the document. The framing of that pupil group is however, very encompassing, in article 3 of the introduction of The Salamanca Statement, (p. 6), special educational needs are defined as referring ‘to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties’ and these difficulties may be confined to a specific period in the lives of the children. Interestingly, however, the same article also states

that schools should accommodate ‘all children regardless of their physical, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups. (UNESCO 1994, 6)

In other words, inclusion can be interpreted to be specifically about SEN-pupils, but it can also be interpreted to be about all children in its most encompassing iteration. In detail, all of the groups of children mentioned in the paragraph above fall outside of the norm of the pupil and therefore it explicitly defines the normal pupils along with those seen as outside of the conception of all-children right now. With reference to Popkewitz, the creation of ‘all-children’ in the name of inclusion and equity, requires special programs to be established to include the excluded (Popkewitz 2009). The Salamanca Statement’s reformulation of special needs education into inclusive education is a concrete example of how one such special program (special education) is deemed insufficient and unjust and thus a necessity for a different program is formulated with a new name. The recurring formulation of ‘all children’ in the Statement also projects the risk-trajectory of the children that do not fit the category and, ultimately, the future adult that is destined to become an outsider in society. These at-risk children call for remediation, and the reformulation of special needs education in The Salamanca Statement provides this remediation through socialisation in the community of the regular school.
Solutions – inclusion and the future

Thus, an idea is formulated about ‘the cultural practices that generate principles about who we are, should be and who is not that we’ yet (Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2006). The Salamanca Statement’s Framework for action includes guidelines for action on several levels, ranging from policy and organisation, school factors, teacher training, external services and resources. The overlapping theme, however, concerns access to education. The political project of Education for all (UNESCO 1990) was about general access to education for children, specifically groups that were systematically held from education in certain areas, such as girls, children coming from poverty, and ethnic minorities. The purpose of The Salamanca Statement was to address the access of children with disabilities specifically. Here, the problem of access to education overlaps both projects, but The Salamanca Statement propagates not only for access to education but also that children should attend the same schools. The problem can thus be said to be about the arbitrary organisational exclusion of certain pupils from ‘regular’ schools, and the risk of both inadequate quality of education these excluded children might receive, as well as the long-term consequences of systematic exclusion of certain societal groups. The Salamanca Statement also clearly articulates a relational perspective on disabilities, acknowledging that disabilities and learning difficulties include pupils with other disadvantages, and can be the result of a ‘disabling society’.

It is in other words quite possible to interpret inclusion narrowly using these documents, or as a matter of placing pupils with disabilities in regular schools and classrooms. The Salamanca Statement even includes a ‘wiggle room’, allowing for segregated educational provision and limitations of these rights. For instance:

- We call upon all governments and urge them to: (...) adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (UNESCO 1994, ix, my emphasis),
- and every person with a disability has a right to express their wishes with regard to their education, as far as this can be ascertained (UNESCO 1994 4, 6, my emphasis).

Additionally, there are articles proclaiming that placement in special schools or establishments must be based in the needs of the particular individual and such institutions ‘need not be entirely segregated’ (p. 18). The Statement also allows room for separate educational provision for ‘deaf and deaf/blind’ persons as they have particular communication needs and for children with severe and multiple disabilities.

On the other hand, the broadest interpretation of inclusion visible in The Salamanca Statement regards the creation of communities (also visible in research, c.f. Göransson and Nilholm 2014), embodies a salvation theme about participation and empowerment that produces citizenship in the future society. Thus, an idea is formulated about ‘the cultural practices that generate principles about who we are, should be and who is not that we’ yet (Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2006). This is related to an unarticulated fear of what exclusion may lead toward. The threat to democracy and society lies in the individuals that are not included within them, and as education is seen as a preparation for participation in the future society, children that fall outside of the scope of education as a tool to shape and form the future society are implicit threats to the future society. The fears of this threat are not explicitly articulated, but rather appear in ‘terms of inclusion and
questions of equity, to reach out to those at risk of falling behind or not catching up—immigrants, ethnic and racial groups who have not succeeded and are marginalized. (...) established through categories of difference in policy and research (Popkewitz, Olsson, and Petersson 2006, 443). From the viewpoint of Popkewitz, education is about ‘making people’, and the political intentions or ‘designs’ are articulated through the policy documents that govern education. The Salamanca Statement illustrates the salvation theme of the inclusive and democratic future society, and education as a tool to achieve that goal. Inclusion then becomes a matter of defining those that risk falling outside the scope of education here and now, and thus falling outside the future society.

**Concluding discussion**

To summarise, the notion of inclusion in The Salamanca Statement encompasses a range of ideals and generally formulated decrees for educational practice. These range from specific definitions and focus on the placement of pupils with special needs or disabilities in regular classrooms, to broader ideals of ‘creating communities’ for all pupils. As discussed above, a similar lack of clarity has been identified in reviews of research literature (Amor et al. 2018; Göransson and Nilholm 2014; Nilholm and Göransson 2017).

The overarching salvation-theme of The Salamanca Statement is that inclusive education is viewed as (cost-effective) means to create a just society by making competent, knowledgeable, tolerant and self-sufficient citizens for the future society. There are also several elements of both collectivist and individualist political ideals in the Statement (c.f. Engsig and Johnstone 2015). Inclusion encompasses both welfare-state ideals emphasising community, participation, and education as a public good, as well as market-ideals of education, emphasising individualisation, choice, efficiency, and education as a private good. The political element of the statement is therefore less protruding than what one might think, perhaps because inclusive education, as an international policy concept, is constructed from an amalgam of political ideals and compromises intended to land and be enacted in very different contexts (Ball 1990; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). The meaning of inclusive education in organisational practice is therefore subject to prioritisation among governmental actors, policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, families and pupils. Any interpretation of inclusion sets constraints on what is seen as possible, plausible and preferable the within the national and local organisational framework and practice (Bacchi 1999) and hence boundaries on the possibilities for innovative inclusive practice (Hunt 2011; Sailor 2017). As different countries have different prerequisites to implement inclusive ideals it becomes important to study comparatively whether, and how, such ideals are expressed in national education policies and educational organisation.

As this article demonstrates, The Salamanca Statement allows for a multitude of interpretations of what inclusion can mean. Viewing policies as products of compromises, intended for interpretation and enactment (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), the lack of clarity of inclusion as a policy concept may be by design. The ‘new thinking on special education’ that is presented in The Statement is, for instance, not very radical or revolutionary. With traditional special education as its point of departure, the Statement’s primary message is inclusion of SEN-pupils in regular schooling. While it has notions of relational views on disability (Nilholm 2006), and suggests alternative ways to finance and organise education to achieve inclusion, it neither questions the notion of
disability per se nor the function of special education as a potentially excluding organisational tradition (e.g. Skrtic 1991). The Statement does not have any radical normative demands concerning the organisation of education either, aside the inclusion of SEN-pupils to the degree deemed reasonable or cost-efficient by national- and local governments and the dissemination of resources to that end.

The consequences for the theoretical field of inclusive education are that researchers should clarify to a more distinct degree whether or not they embrace the concept’s ambiguousness and malleability or whether they wish to argue for more strict definitions. However, accepting the ambiguousness may simply justify the status quo, whereas arguing for more strict conceptions risks replacing incommensurable ambitions with impractical ones. As prior reviews of research have concluded, the operational definitions of inclusion in empirical research must also be more explicitly stated, at least to make comparisons and synthesis easier. Simply referring to The Salamanca Statement does not suffice. When it comes to the development of policy on national and regional levels, there are good reasons to require policy-makers to articulate and clarify what they intend to do and what they mean by inclusion when they argue for educational policies. Given the lack of clarity and general formulations, The Salamanca Statement risks serving as a foundation from which policy-makers (and researchers) can select in order to legitimise definitions of inclusion that may not be very inclusive for pupils.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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