Nind, Melanie. "Inclusive research under fire: Criticisms and defences." *What is inclusive research?*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 67–82. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849668149.ch-004>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 07:20 UTC.

Copyright © Melanie Nind 2014. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

4 Inclusive research under fire: Criticisms and defences

In Chapters 1 and 2, I described some of the claims and distinguishing features of inclusive research. In Chapter 3, I expanded on the nature of inclusive research using examples. I have also pointed out the concern that the detail of how the research is conducted inclusively is often omitted from research reporting and that the challenges of conducting it are inadequately confronted and reflected upon. In this chapter I turn much more to this and other criticisms of inclusive research. These criticisms arise, in part, from claims made for the kinds of research said to be inclusive, participatory or emancipatory. Frankham (2009, p. 16), for example, points out, 'there is a tendency in this field to over-claim the benefits of partnership working and to avoid acknowledging the complexities of the field'. She also points to the need to counter the 'celebratory narrative[s]' without necessarily undermining 'the idea or the ideal of carrying out research with service users'. Like Frankham (2009), Walmsley and Johnson (2003) and others, I regard raising and debating key questions about inclusive research as important to its development, as well as important to extending understanding of what is inclusive research. It is unhelpful for this field of research to be closed to criticism. Instead, in this chapter I follow Frankham's lead in taking seriously the encouragement from Lather (1991) 'to trouble notions of service user involvement from a concern that: "narratives of salvage and redemptive agendas can be ever deeper places for privilege to hide"' (p. 16). I organize the critique of research in relation to the claims made for it. Thus, I discuss in turn the critical debates surrounding the claims that:

1. inclusive research leads to more authentic/better knowledge,
2. inclusive research is more ethical,
3. inclusive research addresses the power imbalances between researcher and researched,
4. inclusive research is inclusive of people who have been silenced by traditional research,

5. inclusive research, particularly emancipatory research, is empowering,
6. inclusive research solves problems; it is a panacea for many research ills.

Inclusive research leads to more authentic/better knowledge

The claim that inclusive research leads to more authentic and therefore better knowledge relates to one of the core ideas underpinning inclusive research discussed in Chapter 2. The claim for authenticity rests on knowledge being grounded in the experiences and values of those concerned. Service users/children – or whoever – turned researchers/co-researchers – or whatever term is used – are considered expert on matters concerning them, privileged in inclusive research terms as insiders. This is the basis for claiming that knowledge produced by them, or resulting from pursuing questions identified by them, is more valid. It is also the basis for claiming inclusive research contributes to more valid, more holistic knowledge, not least because it has previously been missing from the dominant picture.

The critical debate around this claim arises from questioning whether insider knowledge is necessarily more accurate or authentic. Such questioning can be about resisting the temptation to somehow reify those with minority status. James (2007, cited by Porter et al., 2012) raises this question in relation to children's research. Policy- or decision makers may not trust the rigour of young people's research. There may be tensions between accepting children's analysis and accepting analysis that locates findings in the wider context and aids theory building (Coad and Evans, 2008). Nonetheless, Todd (2012) notes that within inclusive research children's voices are often treated and regarded uncritically.

Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p. 499) go further in their concerns with the 'increasing dominance of "participatory" approaches and uncritical ways in which they are often deployed'. For them much of the superiority of participatory approaches is about appearance: appearing emancipatory and democratic or seeming to have 'an epistemological advantage over more traditional approaches' (p. 499). They build on critiques of participatory methods emerging in development studies and human geography and they question the basic epistemological premise that we are best placed to know ourselves and people like us, that 'people are transparently knowable to themselves' and therefore the 'most authentic source

of knowledge about themselves and their lives' (p. 501). This argument is of fundamental importance as it gets to the very heart of inclusive research.

Some inclusive researchers already work from the premise that people may not know themselves best, but they do know themselves differently. This gives rise to the stance that the narratives of lay researchers or participants are *as* important, but not necessarily *more* important than those of traditional researchers. This can fit with the critique of Gallacher and Gallagher (2008), who do not hold academic researchers as experts either, instead arguing that we are all interdependent – all methodologically immature – and therefore all with potential. The pluralist compromise is that for authentic knowledge we need to bring together knowledges 'from diverse actors within different generations [or situations] and so ensure that maximum benefits accrue' (Porter et al., 2012, p. 132). Questions about privileging certain knowledge types do not just arise from those criticizing inclusive research from the outside. Hugely experienced inclusive researcher Gordon Grant has reflected on this:

What counts as knowledge? And what knowledge counts? . . . We are still stuck in this thing about hierarchies of evidence, peer reviewed, non peer reviewed, journal ranking, and all the rest of it . . . the inclusive research project is to me very much about relational practice, it's about pluralities of knowledge and people valuing and recognizing that and not putting one set of voices above another. (Oral contribution cited in Nind and Vinha, 2012, p. 34)

At least for this more nuanced position, the main criticism about the claim of inclusive research to more authentic knowledge is answered.

A second strand of criticism is that inclusive research assumes there is a standpoint shared by groups of researched people, and that inclusive research can add this previously missing standpoint. Todd (2012, p. 196) discusses the idea that the social production of knowledges (in the plural) 'is not the same as the linear addition of missing views that are regarded in more or less essentialist ways'. Citing Moore and Muller (1999), she is critical of a tendency among some researchers to reduce the kind of knowledge one holds to a single plane of experience, such as being a child. This relates to others' criticism of so-called standpoint epistemologies as "naive" and dichotomising' (Mercer, 2002, cited by Warren and Boxall, 2009, p. 290). Such standpoint epistemologies are critiqued by Frankham (2009, p. 8) as conflating having an identity (such as woman) with holding a particular

position (a woman's view). This, she says, is what Newman (2002) calls a 'bioessentialist assumption of a homogeneity of interests and identities' (Frankham, 2009, p. 12). The foolishness of this is apparent, she reminds us, when we consider that there is not always a straightforward distinction between service users and researchers. She gives the example of Peter Beresford – a professor and an 'out . . . mental health service user'; Staddon (2012), both an academic and with experience of alcohol misuse issues – represents another example of someone with insider/outsider identities. Edwards and Alexander (2011) offer their own research *on*, and *with*, lone mothers as an illustrative of how the concept of them as a coherent social group is misjudged. They also present another challenge to the oversimplistic nature of the insider/outsider dichotomy in their strategy to reach marginalized groups through university students from the same group. These peer researchers, they acknowledge, 'occupied a complex, "intermediate" position between the academy and the community' (p. 278).

Claims for superior, insider knowledge are related to claims that inclusive research, particularly that led by lay people, is (or should be) uncontaminated by academic and outsider standpoints. This is an extension of the essentialism discussed earlier. It is a widespread claim within the disabled people's movement and Kellett is a major proponent of it in children's research. She argues, for example, that 'children are party to the subculture of childhood which gives them a unique "insider" perspective that is critical to our understanding of children's worlds' (Kellett, 2005a, p. 4); she draws on Rousseau's eighteenth-century ideas about the 'purity of children's thought', their 'innate wisdom' and the 'essential core value of children's perspectives' (p. 9). She refers to '*genuine* child perspective' (p. 10, my emphasis), and the dangers of adults 'hi-jacking analysis and imposing adult interpretations' (p. 16). Thomson (2007, p. 208) counters this with a view of identities as fluid and multiple – 'constructed through a diverse web of overlapping subjectivities' with childhood being merely a 'socially produced category' with 'many voices' (p. 209).

Even if our identities were one-dimensional the essentialist leap to a particular understanding stemming from our position as woman, child, disabled, and so on is critiqued for assumptions about purity of voice and perspective. As Todd (2012, p. 96) argues, Bakhtin (1986) importantly points out: 'Our speech is filled with other's words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness"'. This makes problematic the notion that by increasing people's participation in research, or using

more creative participatory methods we are increasing our chances of accessing their 'authentic core being' (Bragg, 2010, p. 31, cited by Todd, 2012, p. 96). However much we are involved in research, this argument goes, our discourses (and knowledge) are produced by/within dominant discourses. Thomson and Gunter (2006, p. 852, again cited by Todd, 2012, p. 196) reflect on their research in schools, and state that 'having the right to speak and research did not mean that what was said by students was somehow any more "pure" or "authentic" than any other voices (including our own)'. Moreover, the influence of supporters on co-researchers may be impossible to eradicate and possibly 'just as evident in new paradigm research as in the traditional model' (Kiernan, 1999, p. 46).

Ultimately, Frankham (2009, pp. 16–17) sums up the criticism when she argues:

[I]f personal experience is foregrounded it may be that rather than service users' knowledge being privileged, they become privileged as an (assumed) knower. That is, because they have had a particular experience they are assumed to understand that experience (not just be able to describe it). This may lead to an unfortunate 'taking at face value' everything that a service user describes.

In this way, 'there is a danger that in privileging the personal experience of individuals that new essentialisms will proliferate' (Frankham, 2009, p. 6). Individuals with valid knowledge about their personal experience come to represent whole groups of people who share a common characteristic with them. Their 'accounts, then, can act as a new form of ventriloquism – one person speaking for others – and to the homogenization of groups of people, as accepted accounts of what this experience means are repeated and reified' (p. 16). It is this concept of taking insider knowledge at face value, and being uncritical of the superiority and representativeness of it, that inclusive researchers need to grapple with for the sustainability and credibility of claims to an important research approach. As Grant (2013) asserts, different knowledges need to be tested as well as used.

Inclusive research is more ethical

Another core idea within inclusive research, and a claim made for it, is that it is in some inherent way more ethical than research in which participants provide data that researchers use (possibly exploiting the data and even

the people themselves). Some inclusive researchers seek more nuanced positions. Holland et al. (2008), for example, recognize that participatory approaches are not alone in embedding research in an ethical framework and, furthermore, that research using such approaches have their own ethical complexities and sensitivities. Nonetheless, criticism of the basic claim that inclusive research is more ethical comes from inside and outside the field. Holland et al. (2008, p. 3) join with others in critiquing the notion that research which aims to be participatory is necessarily more enabling for participants, is ethically or morally superior to other types of research, or produces 'better' research', that it is 'unquestionably a "good thing"' (p. 20).

The criticism is both conceptually and practically based. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p. 501) make a conceptual case against participatory research and argue that it is 'important not to be distracted by the ethical allure of "empowerment", "agency" or "self-determination"'. Ethical considerations about power are discussed in the next section. Conolly (2008, pp. 204–5), in contrast, raises more pragmatic arguments that 'giving some socially excluded young women authority to conduct research on others raises a plethora of ethical issues', including that 'informed consent and confidentiality are more precarious when research is carried out by young people', who are sometimes willing to 'misuse knowledge and power bestowed upon them in the research situation'.

My view is that ethics are always contextually situated. Inclusive research contexts therefore have impact on the ethics of the situations experienced by individuals who are researchers/researched. Conolly (2008, p. 205) recognizes this when she makes assertions related to her own situation: '*In the context of my research*, I contend that engaging young people as co-researchers is at best unfeasible and at worst, somewhat unethical' (my emphasis). In inclusive contexts some ethical principles are foregrounded and positively addressed: it is unlikely that questions of who benefits from the research, who gets the credit for it, and who can access it, will not be at the forefront of the researchers' minds. However, other issues such as the roles and practices of those supporting but not leading research emerge as fresh and thorny ethical challenges.

Deciding to do research inclusively may be the start, rather than anywhere near the end, of the consideration of ethical issues that the researcher needs to do. Helpfully, the CCREC have set about addressing some of the ethical issues raised by collaborative or inclusive research,

including what constitutes informed consent when the traditional researcher–researched boundaries are blurred or dissolved and what ethical dimensions emerge from equity-oriented research, which merges with civic action, ‘given traditional university positions on political neutrality and disinterested scholarship’ (CCREC, n.d.). Atkinson (2013) might add a question about what happens to lay people doing research when the research project ends. Her own experience has been that how and when to end her involvement with people with learning disabilities exploring their life stories presented a painful ethical dilemma. Edwards and Alexander (2011) also raise ethical questions about the relationships between community researchers and their communities after the research is over.

Inclusive research addresses the power imbalances between researcher and researched

Addressing the power relationship between the researcher and the researched is at the heart of inclusive research. One of the claims subjected to scrutiny is that inclusive research practices can and do disrupt or rupture the hierarchy of the powerful researcher and the powerless researched. Traditional power dynamics are uncomfortable for inclusive researchers who seek and sometimes assert that they have achieved a more democratic research relationship with those involved. These claims become emotive in situations when the researched have attempted to seize power or adopt radically different roles for themselves as producers of knowledge; those who critique the premise of this enter politically sensitive territory. Nonetheless, criticisms come from various standpoints.

One criticism of the claim for democratization is that moves towards this do not go far enough. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995, p. 669), for example, contend that much of what passes as participatory is still led, designed and managed by others. Participatory research approaches may be condemned by proponents of emancipatory research as merely tinkering at the edges rather than transforming the social relations of research production. Thus, Cahill (2007, p. 299) makes the case that ‘participatory methods can reproduce rather than challenge unequal power relations’ and, moreover, that use of the broad term participation ‘often masks tokenism’. One of the dangers of children (and other lay people) adopting more active research roles is that they are – deliberately or inadvertently – co-opted to adopt professional viewpoints (Todd, 2012). As a discussant of Kellett’s

work observed, the more training given to lay researchers, the less like lay researchers they become as we teach them 'to look at the world through our lenses' (Nind et al., 2012). The cynical viewpoint is that this kind of inclusive research is more about 'active management than active citizenship' (Milewa et al., 1999, cited by Frankham, 2009, p. 13).

A more fundamental criticism concerning power sharing relates to the concept of power this reflects. Again Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) pull the metaphorical rug from under participatory research when they argue that the way in which power is largely positioned within it is fundamentally flawed. The problem arises when the power claim reflects a view of power as a 'commodity to be acquired, exchanged, shared and relinquished at will', 'transmitted by a set of predetermined techniques'. This is Kellett's (2011, p. 211) position: 'The power of child-child research is that it can transcend inequalities in power dynamics and propagate authentic insider perspectives.' Counter-arguments come from the Foucauldian position that power is exercised rather than possessed; like identities it is something we 'do' rather than 'have' (Thomson, 2007, after Butler, 1990). Edwards and Alexander (2011, p. 273) sum up the debate nicely:

Power is posed as something that a group or individual has either more or less of, where those who have power can hand it over to (empower) those who have none. A more sophisticated consideration of power recognises that it is relational. Academic lead researchers cannot decide to transfer 'their' power to community researchers who then 'have' that power and can use it wherever and whenever. Rather, groups and individuals are subject to differing power potentials in different social relationships and contexts.

There is also seen to be a linked flaw in the logic concerning power, participation and competence in participatory research. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) maintain that there is an internal inconsistency in the argument that (1) children are competent to be researchers and (2) that they need special participatory methods to engage them. Thomson (2007, p. 207) also notes this contradiction, previously highlighted by Punch (2002, p. 321): 'if children are competent social actors, why are special "child-friendly" methods needed to communicate with them?' Thomson (2007, p. 214) critiques the poor match 'between the bottom up political philosophy of participatory methodologies and the top down approach of pre-labelling participants prior to their entry into the research space'. This prelabelling

involves a lot of assumptions about where power resides and why, as well as about who is competent.

A significant power differential between academic and lay researchers is that often the former is paid for their research and latter is not. This is a hugely sensitive power dynamic in some research and not easily resolved (Nind and Vinha, 2012); some funding councils want to see funds flow from university partners to their community partners in research projects, while others are very reluctant to fund adequately the lay people whose involvement they claim they value. This leads some academic researchers (and I include myself as 'guilty' of this) to accept an instrumental compromise position in which some participation without proper monetary reward is better than no participation at all. Some self-advocacy groups rely on the income from research to empower them to do other advocacy work; other inclusive researchers recognize some of the freedoms that come with not being tied by funders' agendas (Nind and Vinha, 2012). 'There can be a fine line between involving and empowering community members as peer researchers and exploiting their labour and expertise' (Edwards and Alexander, 2011, p. 273). There are different views on the outcomes of paying researchers as either part of the democratization of research or a means of instrumental control (see Edwards and Alexander, 2011) – 'buying' a level of compliance and accountability. The issues are made even more complex in the United Kingdom where, for many marginalized people, doing research brings with it practical tensions between being paid and claiming benefits.

Inclusive research is inclusive of people who have been silenced by traditional research

The rhetoric surrounding inclusive research includes a rhetoric that powerful researchers have silenced powerless others and that new research approaches can counter this. The truth in the former part of this is hard to dispute; what is more controversial is how far inclusive research can reach out to include and change things for such powerless groups. The territory has undoubtedly shifted – as we have seen, there are now research publications by children, people who are learning disabled, those with diagnoses of schizophrenia, and so on. As examples in Chapter 3 show, enormous social, material and communication barriers to becoming involved in research have been overcome through PAR designs and visual methods,

for example. Thus groups of people previously marginalized in research are more visible and valued, their voices and particular grounded forms of knowledge are included, and so the claims for research contributing to a more inclusive society can be understood.

Some of the critique of inclusivity comes from those who question the extent to which the inclusion of minority voices can and has been achieved. One critique relates to who gets to do inclusive research. Holland et al. (2008, p. 6) rehearse this critique and the viewpoint that only some individuals from various marginalized groups want to get involved. In this way it is those who want to be a good citizen or who are 'emotionally literate' who become heard within inclusive research. The boundary of inclusion may broaden, but only so far. There are limits to the extent to which research will ever stop reflecting a certain (white, middle-class) form of communication and so those willing and able to adopt this are privileged in inclusive research, as in any research. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) note that understandably there are barriers in terms of the time and motivation that many ordinary people have available for research which inevitably limits their inclusion in it. This means that some people are easier to recruit as participants or co-researchers than others. Among people with learning disabilities, it is those who have already been empowered through self-advocacy work who are well positioned to become researchers (McLarty and Gibson, 2000; Johnson, 2009). Conolly (2008) argues that those who are most socially excluded become those who remain excluded from research.

There is a viable counter-argument here. This centres on the resources available for research. Inclusive researchers have shown the necessity of funds and time to facilitate meaningful inclusion (Nind and Vinha, 2012). Conolly (2008) notes that the unreliability of young people in difficult circumstances is particularly problematic if research budgets and timelines are tight; while we cannot change the reality of the young people's lives being fragmented and transitory, there are some things that researchers can do to deal with the challenges this presents. It could be said that we are only beginning to understand what can be achieved in terms of drawing people into research in new ways. With more time and more resources more is likely to be achievable. This raises the debate about the cost-benefit analysis of inclusive research – how much are we willing to invest for what outcomes? There are also questions about how broadly we are willing to expand our concept of research. There have been efforts

to include people with profound impairments and limited non-verbal communication, but the level and kind of involvement and emancipation possible (e.g. through interpreting video-recorded potentially communicative behaviour (McLarty and Gibson, 2000)) may stretch the limits of the concept beyond breaking point.

There are limits to what inclusive research can achieve. This is in part because some important research agendas may be neglected as not being on the horizons of children (Conolly, 2008; Nind et al., 2012) or other lay researchers, and because not all topics are amenable to emancipatory approaches (Kiernan, 1999). It is also because not everyone wants to be involved in research as Johnson (2009) found in her attempts to include learning disabled people in research in Ireland. This reluctance can also arise for potential participants who are involved in illegal, taboo or stigmatized practices. This means inclusive research is left in a position where a heterogeneity of voices is not well represented by the few and, as Kellett (2010, pp. 31–2) argues, where we have to guard against a vocal and articulate few monopolizing the research agenda while ‘hard-to-reach groups languish on the margins’. This is a pertinent reality for inclusive research in the learning/disability field where, despite massive advances in what has been achieved in drawing people into valued research roles, those with profound or multiple impairments and the informal carers who are also oppressed by their situations have made minimal inroads on the new paradigm (Kiernan, 1999). This is true also of those people not already empowered in advocacy/community groups. The extent to which the limits to the scope of inclusive research can be made into a case against it is largely a matter for individual opinion, but it is mostly problematic if a new elite group replaces an old elite group (Danieli and Woodhams, 2005) as this would bring the whole movement into question.

Inclusive (particularly emancipatory) research is empowering

The next area for critical debate concerns the claim that people used to being objects of investigation become empowered, bringing about a transformation in their lives (Fielding, 2004). To recap, this is about the empowerment potential of setting one’s own research agenda, leading one’s own research and developing skills, networks, political agency, confidence and self-esteem (Kellett, 2005a) as one understands one’s

situation through research (Johnson, 2009). There is debate among those involved in inclusive research about who can do the empowering of the participants. If would-be participants do not become the researchers, they remain participants who cannot be empowered by the researcher or necessarily empower themselves (Thomson, 2007). This relates to the criticism that power is not a commodity to be passed or shared around and to an awareness of the 'possible disempowering potentials of research' (Todd, 2012, p. 191).

Some of the arguments about the claims of empowerment stem from a failure among those claiming it to actually theorize or even define it: "‘‘Mere invocation is, seemingly, thought to suffice’’" (Frankham, 2009, p. 21, citing McLaren and Giarelli, 1995, p. 301). Danieli and Woodhams (2005) present a strong critique focused on the dominance of emancipatory research in disability studies. They assert that 'the advocacy of emancipatory research is itself an exercise of power which can result in the silencing of some voices' (p. 282). They argue for separation of emancipation and participation as concepts. This is endorsed by Todd (2012, p. 197), who argues that 'there is no simple equating of the greater involvement of children in research with progress and social justice'. Danieli and Woodhams (2005, p. 290) draw on developments in feminist research in which feminists have reached what they regard as a more nuanced position: 'For many feminists, the solution to the dilemmas posed by emancipatory research has been in the de-coupling of participation and emancipation. In other words, it is recognised that knowledge that can be used to emancipate women's lives does not always require a particular methodological approach to achieve political objectives.' This, they argue, avoids the problem of limiting the people who get to do research and those who get heard to those who conform to a particular view of who is the expert in research. Ultimately, their problem is more with the strong push for emancipatory research rather than the claim that such research is empowering, but the two do become conjoined.

In weighing up arguments about whether claims made for inclusive research being empowering are exaggerated, it is worth remembering that many inclusive researchers aspire to this rather than claim it as reality. Moreover, it is relative to what has gone before, not some absolute universal standard. Even Oliver (1997) has recognized that the power of research to be emancipatory has to be judged after the event. It may well be that judgements about whether research empowers individuals or emancipates

groups is best left to those individuals and groups. This is the argument that empowerment can best be judged from the inside, though an understanding of Freire's (1970) emphases on praxis and dialogue (see Chapter 3) adds layers of complexity here.

Inclusive research is a panacea

Collectively, those who commission, conduct and use inclusive research ask a lot of it (Nind and Vinha, 2012, 2013). It may be that in wanting research to be so transformative, of people, societal problems and ways of knowing, that we are actually asking too much of it. Smith (2012, p. xiii), for example, has argued that a research agenda defined by indigenous people might build capacity and work towards 'healing, reconciliation and development'. Edwards and Alexander (2011, p. 273) argue that expecting community-led or involved research to bring about positive social change is to place 'an unrealistic, even cruelly misleading, burden' on lay researchers. As an expression of our distaste with how research has sometimes been conducted it may be that we expect inclusive research to be a panacea for so many research ills – *and* perform some therapeutic role. There are, inevitably, conceptual and practical problems with this.

Conceptually, questions are raised about just how different inclusive research is from qualitative research, which by its nature already gives voice to participants (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). Equally, the idea of shifting notions of who is expert is problematized, with Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p. 511) proposing instead that we should 'abandon the very notion of "expertise", instead positioning all researchers as "emergent-becomings – always-unfinished subjects-in-the-making – humans cannot claim to be experts: to be fully knowing, competent and rational"'. Some inclusive researchers, inside and outside the academy, do recognize their immaturity as researchers and their fallibility. Nonetheless this line of argument is an important one in that 'participatory methods are in danger of being seen as a "fool-proof" technology that – when applied carefully and conscientiously – will enable research involving children [or others] to achieve ethical and epistemological validity' (p. 513). It is salutary to reflect on the conclusion of Gallacher and Gallagher (2008, p. 513) that 'participatory methods are no less problematic, or ethically ambiguous, than any other research method . . . [not] inherently any better, or worse, than any other research method.'

Adopting an inclusive approach or participatory methods, it is argued, must not be a response to them being available as options, popular at a particular time or in a particular field or popular with a particular group of 'neglected others' (Todd, 2012, p. 192). Methods and approaches must fit the question and not just be used because they are participatory, creative or innovative (Nind et al., 2012). It is not helpful for the hurt at historical/traditional research practices to silence critical dialogue about new research practices, such as when and how they are appropriate, enriching or problematic. It is therefore important that inclusive research approaches are discussed and debated, rather than becoming the unquestionable new orthodoxy (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003). Dialogue is needed which engages multiple voices to get to new understandings we could not reach alone (Nind and Vinha, 2013). This is a premise in inclusive research and can be usefully applied to it – to the conceptual and the practical. In some fields, such as child-led research, the conceptual has been underdeveloped and debated in comparison with the practical (Nind et al., 2012) while in others, such as learning disability research, practical challenges have been glossed over (Walmsley and Johnson, 2003).

Clement (2003, cited by Walmsley and CEPF, in press) refers to the amount of 'claims making' in writing about self-advocacy, that is, 'saying what is important while not explaining the conditions which support its success; nor its challenges and difficulties'. This could also be said of inclusive research. It has meant that the idea of inclusive research as a panacea has gained strength while simultaneously some areas of research and debate have been neglected as too difficult to make inclusive. Fear of getting it wrong is rife in fields where there is a strong culture of inclusive research and the idea, discussed earlier, of us all being immature researchers in development may be used to counter this. The publication of reflexive accounts helps to counter this fear; as researchers are honest about the compromises they make and the pragmatic decision making that is needed, and so on, they challenge the aura that perfect inclusion is necessary or possible.

Also related to the panacea idea, claims about the relative impact that inclusive research can make are challenged: 'a number of critics have pointed out the naivety of the notion that traditional research is without value because it does not result in immediate change in the material and social conditions of people with disability' (Kiernan, 1999, p. 45). Shakespeare (1996) is sceptical that participatory or emancipatory

research will bring about policy change. Kiernan (1999) notes how impact is complex and often happens slowly through cultural change. Fisher and Robinson (2010, p. 209) endorse this, arguing that actively engaging lay/disabled people in social policy research 'takes longer' 'and requires a delicate balance between the stakeholders'. They reflect on their practical experience with this and the need for a longitudinal, formative approach to shaping policy implementation, governed not by service users but by participatory principles with multiple formal and informal approaches making it possible. Service users' data, which was about lived experience, for them was 'a touchstone from which other data could be measured' (p. 216), but working to make impact still involved managing conflicting interests and diffusing potential hostilities between participants. Inclusive research, it seems, may not solve the impact issue but it can add new dimensions to it.

Sometimes the most emancipatory/user-led research is presented as the pinnacle (Kellett, 2005a). Involvement in the dialogic processes of *Doing Research Inclusively, Doing Research Well?* (Nind and Vinha, 2012) led Hilra Vinha and me to question this stance and to see greater value in a more collaborative model. In such interdependent research no-one becomes a pawn in a political battle (Kiernan, 1999) and no voices are suppressed. Research problems are worked through in principled and practical ways, putting the pressures surrounding claims making in their place – secondary to the importance of the research. Doing research inclusively does not solve the issue of who can speak for whom as much as raise new questions about this. Clark (2001, p. 334) reflects on this in relation to the Mosaic approach: 'We did not want to set up a framework for listening which ignored or undervalued the insights of those who spend their lives with young children, but to find new ways for adults to reflect on these perspectives with the children themselves.' Those involved in inclusive research are required to learn how to play their part, sometimes reversing or minimizing their conventional roles (Yardley, 2011) or to see themselves as a resource or consultant (Johnson, 2009). This may require training or practice (Coad and Evans, 2008). In the case of, for example, non-disabled supporters their essential roles may be 'hidden and obscure', thereby evading 'honest reflection' (Walmsley, 2004, p. 65). However, as supporting inclusive research is, as Walmsley (p. 66) argues, such a 'skilled activity' the sustainability and development of inclusive research requires greater transparency about the skills involved and how they are fostered.

Acting with self-restraint may be unappealing to conventional researchers and support workers, but acting in sensitively skilled and subtle ways using 'finely honed skills' (p. 69) could be more attractive and more empowering.

Summary

To summarize, it can be difficult to criticize inclusive research without seeming to criticize democratic principles or the people from minority groups who stand to benefit. Nonetheless, debates do rage about what counts as inclusive research, when it is good enough, whether it is worth pursuing, inherent conceptual confusions and practical realities. Like all kinds of research it needs to be considered with a critical and reflexive openness to explore the role it might play in particular socio-cultural contexts and in addressing particular research problems.