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'That's definite discrimination': practice under the umbrella of inclusion

Article

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'That's definite discrimination': Practice under the umbrella of inclusion

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REVISIONS MADE

In the section entitled ‘Role of the Group’ we have added a paragraph describing some other examples of exclusion experienced by members of the group. The sharing of such experiences at the group meetings is prompted by the themes in the book under discussion. These examples of barriers faced by the participants have been included because of the referee’s comment to link the lack of accessibility experienced within the reading group to the bigger picture of a larger disabling environment.

In relation to the referee’s comment about giving a clearer explanation of how we have used the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ we have reviewed every time we had used these terms and either used an alternative term or added some explanation to make our points clearer.

We have also added a concluding paragraph to show that the lived experiences of these readers suggests that the basic tenets of the social model of disability have not been fully addressed.

‘That’s definite discrimination’: Practice under the umbrella of inclusion

Abstract:

Inclusive practice is well embedded across society and has developed over time. However, although policy and public view have moved forward, the way organisations address the agenda for inclusion often represents a superficial interpretation of this concept. Qualitative data was gathered by using new ethnography to explore the experiences of a library-based reading group for visually impaired (VI) readers. The voices of the individuals shed light on the individual and collective experience of reading. These insights challenge the traditional views of distinct provision which are designed to address targets for inclusion of individuals with disabilities. We argue for a clearer focus on the unintentional consequences of practice in the name of inclusion which leave individuals feeling marginalised. This paper suggests the alternative focus on social justice as offering a discourse which focuses on society and away from the individual.

Key words: social justice, reading groups, visual impairment, inclusion

Points of interest:

- Libraries have expanded their range of reading groups as part of the agenda for social inclusion.
- This research reports on a library-based reading group for visually-impaired people
- In some ways the group supports its members as readers and allows them to be included in the reading group experience.
- However, the participants are also aware that their provision differs from other reading groups in ways that make them feel excluded and marginalised.
- The research discusses the relationship between the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ and asks questions about whether discrete groups can be termed inclusive.

Introduction

The nature of inclusion and its interpretation in practice has evolved over the past few decades (Hodkinson, 2010). Universal policies exist which direct the way agencies and public bodies provide access to their services and spaces. Fundamental to this in the UK has been The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (HMSO, 1995) which reflects society's acceptance of the value of inclusion for all its citizens; a principle also recognised in other equal rights legislation. Therefore, '…we now look upon law more as the engine that will dictate the course society will take' (Nelson, 2004, p. 799).

However, although policy and public view have moved forward, this does not necessarily mean that what is delivered in the name of inclusion actually reflects this shift in perception. This paper argues that the way organisations address the agenda for inclusion often represents a superficial interpretation of this concept rather than being a true application of what is meant. Through the example of a library-based reading group for visually-impaired people (VIPs), this research identifies a number of factors which challenge how far the group can claim to be an example of inclusive practice. While some of these factors reflect the practical issues faced by visually-impaired readers, this paper also identifies issues with how the term 'inclusion' is interpreted and suggests that through interpreting the concept of inclusion narrowly, these groups could equally be said to be examples of exclusion. For this reason, this paper also explores whether terminology itself may play a role in delivering the true spirit of what is meant by inclusion which is a society based on equity and justice and, for the purpose of this paper, referred to as Social Justice.

The significance of word choices is seen, for example, in the Equality Act (HMSO, 2010) which has replaced most of the DDA. What is interesting here is that, while still protecting the rights of disabled people, the very name of this act links its

purpose to equality, rather than disability. As such this could be said to reflect a social model of disability (Oliver, 1996). Similar to the move from integration to inclusion in schools as a result of the Warnock Report (HMSO, 1978), the social model of disability saw a redefinition of disability from being a problem attributed to an individual on the basis of impairment to a problem caused by barriers in society (Nind & Seale, 2009).

However, just as questions have been raised about the balance between teachers' general acceptance of the value of accessibility and inclusion on a theoretical basis and a change in individual practice (Evans & Lunt, 2002), similar questions can be applied to the wider social context (Purdam, Afkamia, Olsena, & Thornton, 2008). Discussions revolve around the terms inclusion, exclusion, social justice and equality and the assumptions reflected within these terms. The tensions and influences that impact on the definition of what makes good inclusive practice are therefore wide ranging (Zekovic & Renwick, 2003). This has an impact on all social areas which must take account of government directives.

Governments' agenda for social inclusion can be seen in many areas, one of which is libraries. Libraries are often at the forefront of inclusive practice, typically involving a variety of measures to ensure public access for all users including those with physical and sensory disabilities. This article reports on a PhD study which explored a reading group for visually-impaired readers (VIPs). Like many VIP reading groups, this group met at the local library. However, the existence of these discrete groups for VIPs can be viewed as a challenge to the agenda for social inclusion. Is the provision of such groups in itself enough or does this question provoke further, difficult reflections on the nature of the practice of social inclusion? This project, therefore, raises questions about how theories of inclusion are transposed into practice. The research explored these issues through new ethnography (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995) which is explained in

more detail after a brief review of the guidance relating to libraries, reading groups and social inclusion.

Library Policy

In the UK, a key document in the move towards social inclusion in libraries was *Framework for the Future (DCMS, 2003).* This outlined the government's long-term strategic vision for public library services with three areas of activity at the heart of this modern mission. One of these areas encompassed measures to tackle social exclusion, build community identity and develop citizenship (ibid. , p. 7), reflecting the fact that tackling social exclusion and promoting inclusion has been a major preoccupation for government since 1997 (Riddell, 2009). *A National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups* (MLA, 2004), prepared as part of the *Framework for the Future Action Plan*, helped to establish libraries' understanding of the purpose of reading groups and their agendas. This document states that reading groups benefit both individuals (by giving a sense of belonging and inclusion) and libraries (as a tool for delivering on national and local government priorities, such as social cohesion).

Against a background in which the traditional demographic profile of a reading group member is 'white, well-educated, retired and female' (MLA, 2004, p. 49), libraries have worked to expand their provision as part of their response to addressing the agenda for social inclusion. The Reading Agency's report (*Reading Groups in Libraries: Mapping Survey Findings - England and Wales*, 2008) found a diverse range of library-based groups, such as groups for elderly people, families, women, children and various ethnic communities. Of interest to this study is the fact that almost half of libraries (47.2%) provide discrete reading groups for those with visual impairments (VIPs). Therefore, libraries are adopting practice to meet the needs of all its users in line with government directives.

Context

A longitudinal ethnographic study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) was undertaken to follow a VIP reading group from its inception in 2007. From an initial four members, the group grew to seven regular members. The group meets monthly for one hour on a weekday afternoon. Members make their own transport arrangements to and from the group. The library is located in a town, close to the shopping centre, with the meeting room on the third floor accessed by stairs or lift. Two librarians lead meetings on alternate months and one of these has responsibility for sourcing multiple copies of audiobooks for the group. The books (unabridged versions of the text read cover to cover by volunteers) are provided by a charitable organisation.

After obtaining ethical consent, five members volunteered to be interviewed about their individual and collective experiences of reading. These were:

- Anne, aged 80+, the oldest participant (but not the oldest group member) with an age-related visual impairment
- Pete, 59, who has been blind since childhood. He is a Braille reader
- Pia, 60+, her eye condition was diagnosed in her mid-twenties
- Jane, 50, who has been blind since childhood and is a Braille reader
- John, 53, who has been blind since childhood

Methodology

The methodology for this project was based on new ideas of ethnography, which reflect postmodernism's preference for seeking out multiple voices and mistrust of meta-narratives 'that implicitly make claims about absolute truths and that, therefore, rule out the possibility of alternative versions of reality' (Bryman, 2004, p. 500). New

ethnography, therefore, encourages polyphony in presenting the various perspectives of participants (Fontana, 2002). Given that the aim of the project was to provide what the anthropologist, Geertz, called 'thick description' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 25), new approaches to ethnography were compatible with constructing a multi-layered text which could include both the individual and the collective experiences of these readers. The two main methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews and observation of group meetings with the researcher taking the role of participant-as-observer (Jorgensen, 1989). The project ran between September 2007 and October 2010. Data was collected from 25 meetings with the researcher attending a further six meetings during the final writing-up stages of the project. Data analysis involved thematic coding. The literature review conducted for this project had suggested social inclusion as a potential area of interest and issues of social inclusion were identified in the data. It is this aspect of the research which is reported in this article.

Findings

The interview data revealed several themes that impacted on these VIPs. These were: feeling excluded as readers, the role of the group in supporting reading and the role of the librarian in facilitating the group.

Excluded Readers

The most significant theme to emerge from the data was a striking awareness shared among the group of the constant barriers they faced when trying to pursue their interest in reading. One dominant theme concerned the availability of accessible texts. At one meeting the librarian passed on the information that less than 5% of published books is made available in alternative formats (Lockyer, 2005). The participants recognised the relevance of this to their experiences as readers, referring to it several times both during

meetings and during interviews. However, access is not the only issue; the expense of reading materials in alternative formats causes further difficulties for those on limited budgets. Moreover, the cost of a book often depends on a number of other factors, such as whether or not the text is abridged or who the narrator is. These factors impact on these readers in several ways. Firstly, comments from some of the participants made it clear that they felt excluded from full engagement with the book if they had to read an abridged version:

> Anne: I hate it if it's abridged...I feel I haven't really read the book

Furthermore, the quality of the narrator also affects engagement with the text:

> Pete: ...at points I did not really understand what was being said...it wasn't the author's fault, it was the reader's fault...

This is a particular issue with the books provided for the group. The field notes record that the participants' expectations of these narrators were not high and, significantly, none of the group uses the organisation which supplies the group for their private reading. On the other hand, narrators of commercial audio-books (particularly professional actors such as Stephen Fry) can enhance the reading experience. For example, one participant stated that listening to Stephen Fry read the *Harry Potter* books was an example of listening being better than reading, but this has cost implications. One participant referred to this in a comment about her collection of Trollope novels:

> Anne: it's so expensive the place I write to, admittedly beautifully read...if I hadn't, I wouldn't have enjoyed the Trollope...but...oh, gosh, how much did that cost me, into the hundreds it was, I think it was about £350 for the six books

This leaves VIP readers facing difficult choices. Do they limit their reading to the materials that are freely available, or select from a larger choice of professionally recorded books that may be of higher quality but cost significantly more? One way to overcome this obstacle would be to increase access to audio-texts through technology and computers:

> John: ...if you can use a computer...it does open our world to a lot more reading material than is readily available to us

However, this facility is not necessarily available to all:

> Anne: ...if you live in a house where a computer is not used...you can't do any of these modern things

Access to reading materials is, therefore, not straightforward for those with visual impairments. The research identified a complex web of factors (the limited availability of accessible publications; prohibitive cost; abridgements; the impact of the narrator on the reading experience; access to technology) which leads visually-impaired people to feel excluded as readers.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Furthermore, the VIPs showed awareness of the fact that these difficulties were not the result of, but imposed on top of their impairment. Pia recounted a time when she tried to buy a book, only to find that the printed version was on offer for half-price while the audio version, which was abridged, cost twice as much – less text for more money. As a result of this she queried why VIPs are penalised as readers. Her use of the word 'penalised' suggests a feeling of being treated unjustly.

John found Braille difficult to learn as a child, and his reading only really began when audiobooks became more readily available. However, despite benefiting from the increase in audio-books, he believed this growth was motivated by commercial factors -

a way for publishers to make money - rather than for the benefit of visually-impaired readers:

> John: ...it wasn't because, oh wouldn't it be nice if all those blind people would be able to read a book... that really had nothing to do with...the commercial side

Pete made similar comments, referring to copyright restrictions which prevent books being made available to VIPs:

> Pete: ...why is there so much fuss about blind people having access to these books...

The belief that the needs of visually-impaired readers are not treated as important was, perhaps, expressed most forcefully by Jane, referring back to a comment she had made about the quality of the narrators in the audiobooks used by the group:

> I just wanted to amplify one of the comments I made...about [the narrators] being volunteers... basically I feel that as a visually-impaired person I have to deal with a world that's not perfect...and I have to develop strategies to overcome difficulties and one day one of my colleagues was in absolute apoplexy, he was furious because he'd gone to a room to do a presentation and there wasn't a powerpoint connection or something and he was, grrrr, fancy, and I thought, yeah, but my world's like this all the time...you are expecting perfection and you are expecting everything to be tickety-boo, and I didn't mean to be ungrateful to the volunteers but it's the fact that they can do it any old how and we should be grateful

Jane's reference to the differences between her experiences and those of sighted colleagues clearly reflects a sense of injustice and, while the comment is mostly linked to issues at work, it was prompted by a frustration linked to reading. The participants, therefore, were well aware of barriers which prevented them from full inclusion in contemporary reading culture. They shared their frustrations at the apparent imbalance of access to reading materials and the cost implications this has.

Role of the group

Given the issues VI readers face, it is, therefore, interesting to consider the role the reading group plays in their reading lives. Reading groups are a popular contemporary activity, so much so that their growth over recent years has been described as 'not so much a tide as a tidal wave' (MLA, 2004, p. 10). Library-based groups, such as the one at the heart of this study, provide opportunities for VI readers to engage with this cultural phenomenon. However, while studies of women's reading groups show that the women revered their book clubs as female-only spaces and actively controlled membership to protect their identity (Devlin-Glass, 2001; Long, 2003; Rehberg Sedo, 2004), this was not the case with the participants in my study when asked to explain their motivation for joining this reading group:

> Jane: ...logistically I can go... if we were having to go to different people's houses all the time that would be quite a logistical nightmare

> Pete: ...it would be difficult for me to go to a group where they were using a print book because I've got the problem of tracking it down and then getting it into some format I can use, which all takes time and is quite a lengthy process

The participants in this study, therefore, gave pragmatic reasons for joining the group rather than a deliberate, active decision to seek out people with whom they share a commonality (visual impairment).

While the participants spoke positively about some aspects of the group, their comments showed that feelings of exclusion are relevant to their experiences as reading group members as well as their experiences as individual readers. In other words, they were aware of differences between their experiences and those of sighted reading group members.

One reason for this linked to the range of books available to them (as discussed above). During the interviews, it became clear that a key reason for wanting to belong to a reading group was the hope that this would expand their range of reading, mirroring what other research has found (Devlin-Glass, 2001; Hartley, 2002; Hartley & Turvey, 2009). In some instances, the group is successful in this:

> Jane: ...it's a book I wouldn't have otherwise read and I think that's the whole brilliant thing about this club...it's taken me outside of my comfort zone and I really enjoyed the experience of it

However, the group's reading was also described as 'repetitious' and frustration at the choice of books available to them was expressed quite forcefully. The participants, therefore, saw the reason for their exclusion from what other groups might be reading as being linked to the decision to rely on one source for their audiobooks:

> Anne: ...the point is...with an ordinary reading group you can have any book that is on the shelf, with our reading group we've got to have the ones that have been done which means limiting it tremendously

On one occasion, when discussing books for the group's reading list, one participant put forward a number of titles adding that her friends had read them at their reading group and that she felt excluded as none of the titles were available to the VIP group:

> Jane: ...it's this peer pressure, isn't it, because everybody else is reading it, you feel you should be part of it

The group's role in supporting its members as readers is, therefore, not straightforward. The opportunity to meet with others who share the loss of vision might have been a significant factor in choosing a VIP reading group but this was not the case for these readers. Instead, their awareness of the limited availability of texts in alternative formats leads these VIPs to believe that they would face difficulties in

accessing the materials that would be necessary for membership of other groups and so, to some extent, they 'self-exclude'.

However, one effect of belonging to a VIP reading group is that the group can function at times as a support group and allow the members to explore their experiences beyond the group. This is because, as with other reading groups, the discussion of the book can prompt members to make links with their own lives. Perhaps the most powerful example of this within this group was during the discussion of *The Kite Runner (Hosseini, 2004).* This book prompted a discussion of integration and exclusion through exploring the experiences of refugees. However, as the discussion widened, members shared their own experiences of being excluded from shops, restaurants and taxis because of having a guide dog. Such experiences may contribute to the members' belief that joining another reading group could be problematic.

The final theme looks at the role of the librarian.

Role of the librarian

As a library-based group, the role of the librarian is significant. Library policy states that belonging to a reading group empowers individuals (MLA, 2004, p. 10).While this is largely meant in terms of developing confidence, reading groups could be empowering in other ways, such as allowing members to make decisions about their group. However, the structure of this group meant that the members were largely excluded from decision making or organisational roles. Barriers existed that prevented full involvement.

For example, decisions about how to source reading material rest with the librarians but impact significantly on the members. Indeed, the group's reliance on one source of audiobooks was questioned by one of the participants:

> John:...if there is a way of getting a better choice and a wider choice for the librarians to pick books that they might think might be good for a reading group...you should take advantage of that, not stick with what you've got if it's not the best you can do

Some VIP reading groups provide books in more than one format (audio and large print) by calling in stock from other authorities. Some use other strategies; for example, the group may not read the same book but rather books by the same author or books on a specific theme so that materials can be taken from library stock, thereby widening the range of books available. Different VIP groups, therefore, operate in different ways. However, as regards to this group, the librarian has made the decision to depend on a single source of books. Furthermore, although the group is usually consulted about reading choices for the group, on one occasion, the librarian was asked to choose the following year's reading material while telephoning the organisation which supplies the books on another matter. On this occasion, therefore, there was no consultation with the group. While this was not the librarian's fault, the result was that the members were disempowered. However, even on those occasions when the members have been consulted, the catalogue has not been made available in an accessible format, but rather the librarian has read aloud from a printed copy of the list, making it difficult for the members to be truly involved in the process. In fact, information which needs to be shared with the group members, such as dates for meetings or information about events at the library, is only ever made available in print. One participant commented on the inappropriateness of this method:

> Jane: she gave me a print list...I don't like to upset her but I have said to her a couple of times, oh, can't you send this electronically because to give me a print reading list, well, it's still in my bag, I haven't a clue what's on it

Because of the librarians' decision to use this method of communication, members are either excluded from knowledge or they have to rely on a sighted person to read the information for them, placing them in a disempowered, dependent position.

Another way in which the members recognised that their group differs from private groups is that the discussion is led by the librarian. While the members could see some benefits to this, one participant did question why the group members themselves could not lead the discussion on occasion. She also suggested that the group might be involved in establishing the group's 'mechanics' or 'terms and conditions':

> Jane: ...sometimes I think once a year the group might want to remind itself of what its aims are, what its code of ethics is or what its code of conduct is...

These words are significant in suggesting that some matters could be decided by the group members, giving them a sense of ownership and control. However, such a discussion has not occurred. While the group is offered as a response to policy, the way this is translated into practice is, therefore, somewhat at odds with the intended outcomes of the policy. As a result, the impact of the reading group on the lives of these readers was mixed. While the participants largely valued the opportunity to belong to a reading group, certain aspects of the running of the group left them feeling frustrated and created a sense of exclusion.

Discussion

The previous section shows that, while this group is intended as a tool for inclusive practice, the participants nevertheless experience exclusion on several levels. However, what has not been challenged until now is the actual existence of the group itself. Reading groups for visually-impaired people are one of a number of discrete groups offered by libraries. It can be assumed that each type of group has its own purpose and agenda; for example, the agenda for a 'Basic Skills' group might be to provide a safe atmosphere where members are not intimidated by readers with higher literacy levels.

These groups may well address the needs of certain sections of the community very effectively. However, there would seem to be a paradox when segregated groups are offered as part of the agenda for inclusion. The question, therefore, becomes: Are these groups really symbols of inclusion or something quite the opposite? It is this discussion which has implications for a wider context.

Taking a critical view of language throws into focus the relationship between the terms inclusion and exclusion. These terms are fundamentally interlinked as inclusion has built into its very meaning the idea of exclusion and vice versa. The two ideas, therefore, depend on each other for meaning. To follow this argument logically, the result is that the idea of inclusion has embedded within it what Titchkosky (2007, p. 5) refers to as the 'excludable type'. While measures for tackling social inclusion are meant to address the issue of segregation, they do not address the underlying issue: society constructs some groups/individuals as 'excludable types'.

This question arose during an interview with one of the participants when he said that he should be able to join any reading group offered by the library. When asked if the fact that a VIP group was available meant that the library was fulfilling its obligation in providing him with access to a reading group, his answer showed that he did not think this was the case:

> John: ...I still think that's discriminatory, isn't it...that's definite discrimination... there's no getting away from it that they have set up a VI one...and that's good, you can't knock that...but I don't necessarily think that they would say, well, sorry but you know...you've got to stay with your own kind

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

> Jane: ...I think it's great that we've got our VI group...I think it's really brilliant but...in 2008 we shouldn't need it, should we

While VIPs are not prohibited from joining the other library-based reading groups, they are encouraged to join the VIP group. However, none of the VIPs in this study were specifically seeking a reading group for visually-impaired people; they simply wanted to join a reading group. This raises the question of how easy access to other groups would be. Of the nine reading groups run by this borough, one meets in a pub, one meets in a hall next to a library and the remainder meet in local libraries. Eight of the nine groups (all but the pub-group) would, therefore, be accessible to the participants by public transport. In addition, the library holds 119 sets of books for loan either by private reading groups or library-based reading groups. Of these 58 (just under 50%) are actually available on audio in the library stock. If one assumes that a group reads 11 books a year, this would be enough for over 5 years. Despite the comments above, neither the group members nor the librarians had explored in any depth the possibility of VIPs joining other library-based reading groups. Instead, it was just assumed that these readers would form a separate body and be separate from the other reading groups. This assumption was not challenged despite the fact that both the librarians and the VIPs themselves are aware of the importance and value of inclusion. They freely accept this surface attempt at making what appears to be varied and personalised arrangements that offer opportunities for those with disabilities. But does it?

Recent research (Wilson & Birdi, 2008) has actually revealed a lack of understanding within library services of what social exclusion means with a 'tick box' approach adopted by some. As a result, measures to tackle this issue have evolved as add-ons rather than as part of the core library offer (Pateman & Vincent, 2010). Discrete groups may be an easy way of providing evidence that libraries are meeting the inclusion agenda. To all appearances, being able to list a wide range of groups for

different types of people could be easily assumed as concrete examples of how society has made progress towards meeting the needs of all members. However, this research questions that assumption and pushes forward the uncomfortable idea that perhaps a closer look at this practice is what is needed. Providing such distinct groupings with defined entrance criteria, is, in some ways, the very opposite of the aim of the library. Following on, by the very exclusive nature of the groupings, these readers are reluctantly being grouped in a way which actually removes them, and therefore defines them as an 'excludable type'.

Because the idea of exclusion is implicitly embedded within the notion of inclusion, these terms become problematic. This paper, therefore, argues that, it would be better to search for alternative terms. One possibility would be the term 'social justice', a term Pateman & Vincent (2010) discuss in depth in the context of public libraries. However, adopting the same critical approach to language means that, just as the term inclusion embeds the idea of exclusion, the term justice embeds the idea of injustice. In terms of disability, this is significant. The concepts of inclusion and exclusion are based on an individual model of disability (a person is discriminated against on the basis of a personal attribute – their impairment) while the concept of social justice (and therefore injustice) is the result of the way society operates and is, therefore, more compatible with a social model of disability. To be more specific, while the terms 'included' and 'excluded' can be attributed to individuals, it is more difficult to attribute the terms 'just' and 'unjust' to individuals. These terms link more readily to society. Adopting an agenda for social justice (rather than inclusion) would, therefore, symbolise that society needs to change. As Miller writes:

> To pursue social justice is to believe that society can be reshaped – its major social and political institutions changed – so that each person gets a fair share of the benefits (Miller quoted in Pateman & Vincent, 2010, p. 32)

While this paper reports on a study of a VIP reading group, this discussion of inclusion/exclusion/social justice is equally relevant to other contexts. For example, within schools, policies advocate inclusive practice. However, as already discussed, because the notion of inclusion cannot exist without the concept of exclusion, what these policies actually do is construct children with physical, sensory or learning difficulties as 'excludable types'. While schools adopt practices to include these children, they do not address this fundamental issue. By using the language of inclusion, children receive the message that there are groups of people who might reasonably be left out and this exclusion is based on a personal attribute. This suggests that, while the move from integration to inclusion was meant to signal a move away from the cause of the problem being the result of a deficit in the child, this is not actually the case. If, instead, schools and other social institutions (libraries) adopted practices aimed at social justice, this would communicate the message that society has a responsibility to treat all people justly.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission describes their vision as 'a society at ease with its diversity, where every individual has the opportunity to achieve their potential, and where people treat each other with dignity and respect' (*How fair is Britain? The first triennial review executive summary*, 2010, p. 2). While legislation may be one way to achieve this, *Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review* (HMSO, 2007, p. 2) warns that 'legislation will not by itself deliver a better, fairer, more equal society.' While this paper has concentrated on a library-based reading group for visually-impaired people, discussions about how policy is translated into practice or about how terminology contributes to understanding can easily be applied to a wider context. It is true that the term 'social justice' is a significant part of contemporary

discourse but the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ are also commonly used. However, this paper argues that the relationship between these terms needs to be better understood as framing policy from the perspective of inclusion simply perpetuates the notion of the ‘excludable type’ and runs counter to what these policies aim to achieve. A linguistic shift could, therefore, be powerful and symbolise a new agenda.

Conclusion

The experiences of the participants in this study raise questions that can be applied much more widely than one group of readers. These questions relate to how policy is translated into practice. While policy may claim to reflect the principles of the social model of disability, the lived experiences of disabled people, such as the readers in this study, challenge this. This is because practice can represent a surface approach to inclusion, rather than the true ethos of what is meant. Furthermore, language itself contributes to this. Without greater understanding of the impact terminology has on how disabled people are constructed, certain groups in society will continue to be constructed as ‘excludable types’ and negate the aim to be inclusive. This paper, therefore, suggests that, along with debates about practice, there should also be more debate about discourse.

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Figure 1

Technology
Availability
Cost
Format
Abridgements
Narrator
VIP readers