Reconsidering Inclusion: Western theory and post-Soviet reality.

Fiona Hallett, David Allan and Graham Hallett

Abstract

This article analyses the views of individuals from a post-Soviet context in order to better understand current thinking around difference and disability. In this study, the multiplicity of human experience articulated by the research participants highlights immediate, rather than philosophical, priorities. The particular social, cultural and political history of the Republic of Armenia offers an insight into the challenges of, and opportunities for, the development of inclusive practices in the former Soviet Union. As such, it could be argued that the West has much to learn from national contexts that might be dismissed as exclusionary.

<u>Introduction</u>

This article seeks to analyse the complexities of the Soviet legacy of defectology that continues to impact upon educational practices in post-Soviet contexts. The need to understand such contexts is grounded in the fact that much research around inclusion, such as studies that critique the impact of labelling (Back et al. 2016) or examine ethical norms and social justice in education (Reindel, 2016), is based upon policy and practice in the global West. This creates a paradox; whilst these debates are central to the development of inclusive practice, they often pay scant attention to national contexts beyond the West which may be embedded in reductionist assumptions about the worth of citizens (Hartblay, 2014).

By offering perspectives on the impact of welfare state paternalism, scholars such as: Hartblay & Ailchieva; Lapham & Rouse; Mladenov; and Phillips, invite a more nuanced examination of the cultural reality of how disability is experienced in post-

Soviet contexts. In this regard, and in response to the call to "conduct more research on factors that may impact ableist ideas and actions" (Friedman & Owen 2017: 2), this study analyses the lived experiences of individuals in the Republic of Armenia in order to shed a different light on the "conceptual schemas of disability that are formulated by Western theorising" (Gable 2014: 88). Thus, working within the aforementioned 'legacy of defectology' (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012; Hartblay & Ailchieva, 2013; Phillips, 2009, 2012), the purpose of this study is to explore attitudes towards a young person with a 'hidden disability' – Elena. In the analysis of the data, student teachers, individuals with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (hereafter termed SEND) and the parents of individuals with SEND predominantly foregrounded Elena's potential, whilst teachers and citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues generally foregrounded perceived deficits.

<u>Political and Historical Context</u>

The Republic of Armenia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and, together with Georgia and Azerbaijan, belongs to the last group of countries to enter the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). As the ENP seeks to foster stabilisation across its Southern and Eastern neighbours and promote key European Union (EU) interests of good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights, it seems sensible to assume that countries like Armenia see the EU as a natural partner.

Armenia is administratively divided into 10 regions (known as marzes) and Yerevan (the capital), and unemployed youth, women, and especially people with disabilities have been described as being much more vulnerable if they do not live in Yerevan (Karapetyan et. al., 2011).

In 2012, UNICEF expressed concern that:

"discrimination and negative attitudes toward disability continue to permeate the region, which, in part, can be traced to the Communist past when individuals were valued according to their productivity and contributions to the advancement of the State" (p. 20).

Since independence, it has been acknowledged that whilst the economy, infrastructure, and public services of Armenia have improved greatly, the majority of officially registered 'Persons with Disabilities' (PWD) continue to face problems from both societal perceptions of disability. In addition, disquiet has been articulated around that fact that laws and regulations are not well enforced and are largely unknown to the PWD population (SCI 2012: 5) and the official refusal to admit that marginalisation and vulnerability existed under state socialism Larskaia-Smirnova & Rassell (2014: 222).

At present, people in Armenia are deemed to be disabled if they have lost a certain percentage of their ability to work; for children, the criteria applied are 'activeness' and 'engagement'.

In a review of ratification of international conventions, a Working Group of the European Commission noted that:

"In 2014-2015, the Armenian authorities made an overall serious effort to address the shortcomings identified in the area of human rights protection in Armenia. The Armenian authorities also deployed tangible efforts to be more inclusive in their processes related to human rights protection, involve civil society and consult international and regional expertise with a view to meet international standards in this field"

However, it was also reported that:

"Armenia needs to further step up efforts to effectively address several persisting human rights problems, in particular the lack of independence and integrity of the judiciary and of the political system as a whole, no sufficient legislative and enforcement framework against use of torture and ill treatment, corruption, discrimination against minorities, discrimination and violence against women and child poverty" (European Commission, 2016: 23)

Specific concerns about the degree to which education systems in the region are able to respond to the special needs of pupils from vulnerable groups have also been raised. In 2015, an Armenia-United Nations Development Assistance Framework was agreed between the Government of Armenia (GoA) and the United Nations (UN), in order to guide cooperation between the GoA and the UN from 2016-2020. A concern highlighted in the framework agreement was that:

> "Children with disabilities are among the most marginalized groups facing multiple deprivations: 71% do not attend preschool, 18% do not attend school, 12% attend special schools, 13% live in institutions (special schools and orphanages), 34% do not attend any community events and 73% do not use rehabilitation services. In an effort to ensure that children grow up in a family environment, the government reduced the number of children in residential care by 4,000 since 2007. However, another 4,000 children still reside in 40 different institutions" (UN Armenia, 2015: 23).

By speaking to the edited collection of case studies in Rouse and Lapham (2013), and the work of Cassandra Hartblay and Sarah Phillips (amongst others), the intention of this paper is to explore perceptions of the purpose of education in the Republic of Armenia. Whilst there are clear commonalities with many of the national contexts examined by these authors, very little work of this nature has been conducted in Armenia. Nonetheless, the work of authors such as Balasanyan (2018), albeit in relation to Higher Education, serves to remind us that "Europeanisation may be theorised in terms of globalisation and major social transformations not exclusively initiated by the European Union" (p. 584). Asperger's Syndrome was selected as the focus for this study as an example of a condition that has no apparent physical difference in a country that defines Persons with Disabilities in terms of their ability to work, activeness and engagement.

Methodological Approach

This study utilised Phenomenography, a fairly unique approach within the field of disability scholarship but one which deserves greater attention as it provides two levels of analysis. Specifically, Phenomenography:

> "provides a way of looking at collective human experience of phenomena holistically despite the fact that such phenomena may be perceived differently by different people and under different circumstances" (Åkerlind 2005: 72).

For those new to the field, or unfamiliar with a particular national context, the first level of analysis seeks to identify 'conceptions' (Marton 1981) or 'understandings' (Sandberg 2000) presented as an 'outcome space' - a set of hierarchically inclusive structured categories of description concerning the phenomenon under study (Järvinen, 2004). In this way, conceptions are mapped, rather than represented via a typology of themes, in order to describe, in detail, the qualitative difference between one concept and another.

Each of the outcome spaces that follow is made up of the minimum number of different categories that describe variation across the sample (Marton and Booth, 1997: 111). The second stage of Phenomenographic analysis involves the reformulation of these outcome spaces into a single table in order to discern the structural and referential features of the responses from each group; that is, in this case, to see what is foregrounded in responses (either positively or negatively) and how responses increase in complexity.

Five respondent groups were selected for this research: individuals with SEND; parents of individuals with SEND; student teachers; teachers; and citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues. These diverse groups were chosen in order to explore the issues raised by UNICEF, Save the Children International and

the United Nations from the perspectives of: those directly experiencing the cultural and political context in Armenia; those charged with educating individuals with SEND; and those whose attitudes and perspectives do much to shape the lived experience of individuals with SEND beyond the educational context.

The initial plan was to interview a range of individuals from each of these respondent groups, and individual and focus group interviews were trialled. However, the interviewees tended to focus upon what was 'wrong' with a person with Asperger's Syndrome. Whilst this was understandable, the aim was to explore perceptions of a young person with a hidden disability with an option to focus upon the capabilities of that person, rather than on deficits (Reindal, 2016). Therefore, in order to capture real world views in relation to a given situation, and person, participants were presented with the following vignette:

> Elena is ten years old and was recently diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. She has been attending a mainstream school since the age of five but has been excluded from three schools due to what her teachers describe as erratic behaviour. Her previous teacher described her as being the perfect child until she was asked to sit at a group table or take part in social activities. She has always found free time and lunchtime difficult to cope with. Elena is very interested in Astronomy and likes to talk about it all of the time, she enjoys working on the computer and prefers the company of adults.

The vignette was designed to represent the experiences of a person with a given 'label'. Five other vignettes were developed alongside the one described in this article, representing: Physical Disabilities; Down Syndrome; Learning Difficulties; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; and Emotional/Behavioural Difficulties. However, when used, each of these vignettes appeared to be interpreted in terms of potential productivity (reflecting current definitions of disability across post-Soviet nations), producing very limited responses. As vignettes should provide

enough contextual information for respondents to clearly understand the situation being portrayed but be ambiguous enough to ensure that multiple solutions exist (Seguin & Ambrosio 2002; Wason, Polonsky & Hyman 2002), the vignette used here most closely achieved these ends.

On reading the vignette, each participant was asked what human rights Elena has, where she should be educated, and why. The vignette was translated into Armenian and then piloted to ensure that those reading it could see the strengths of, and challenges faced by, Elena as an individual (with Asperger's Syndrome). The vignette was administered by Armenian NGOs, the Public Administration of the Republic of Armenia, Goris State University, the Armenian State Pedagogical University and Eurasia International University. Individuals with SEND, the parents of individuals with SEND and citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues were invited to participate at a National Awareness Raising Day. Student and serving teachers were invited to take part in the research by the Armenian State Pedagogical University. In each case, the purpose of the project was explained, and participants were invited to complete (or express) their responses to the vignette and return it if they consented to their information being used. A four week 'cooling off' period was given for any participant to subsequently withdraw their responses after which, each university, public administration body or NGO submitted the data to be coded.

For each group, responses were selected to represent variation in age, gender, region, and, in the case of individuals with SEND, as wide a range of self-reported Special Educational Need and/or Disability as was possible.

The results analysed below comprise:

Individuals with SEND:
Age: 15-89
6 with Physical Disabilities (4 female, 2 male aged 15-68)
3 diagnosed as Blind or with a severe sight impairment (2 Female, 1 male aged 21-38)
4 diagnosed as Deaf or with a Severe Hearing Impairment (2 female, 2 male aged 23-72)
3 diagnosed as learning impaired (1 male, 2 females, aged 23-45)

Parents of individuals with SEND
11 Female and 9 male aged between 22 and 54.

Student Teachers
10 female, 10 male aged between 19 and 24.

Teachers
10 female and 10 male, aged between 23 and 47.

Citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues.
10 female and 8 male, aged between 20 and 62.

Results – stage 1

What follows are the outcome spaces for each of the respondent groups involved

in this research. In each case, the outcome space is elucidated by typical, but

actual, quotations.

Table 1. Outcome space for individuals with SEND

Hope
Aspiration
Normalisation
Acceptance of Social Injustice

This group expressed acceptance of social injustice as evidence of

marginalisation with comments such as 'well, she should be in mainstream school

but that won't happen; it's wrong but that is the way things go here' (Female with a

Visual Impairment, aged 21) and 'things have not changed as quickly as they

should, she should have the same chance as anyone else' (Female with a Hearing Impairment, aged 53).

The qualitative difference between quotations relating to an acceptance of social injustice and those representing normalisation were epitomised by comments relating to her being seen as 'more normal these days' (Male with Physical Disabilities, aged 68) and posing 'fewer threats to the public, now that such children are visible and not institutionalised' (Male diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, aged 23).

Beyond this, some respondents articulated aspirations for Elena, making specific reference to the fact that:

> 'In this case, my preference would be a regular, standard school because Elena needs to get used to interacting and cooperating with people. As I understood from her interests, she has high abilities, and perhaps she is even more mature than children of her age' (Female with hearing difficulties, aged 42).

Similar comments were made by individuals in relation to 'her academic ability' (Female with physical disability, aged 34) and the fact that she 'can talk intelligently with adults' (Female with Moderate Learning Difficulties, aged 32).

Finally, almost all respondents mentioned the need for a more equitable society expressing some hope that 'we are moving towards this now. Schools are becoming inclusive, especially in Yerevan' (Male with Physical Difficulties, aged 17). This sentiment echoes descriptions of the path to Inclusive Education described by Kauffman & Popova (2013: 108) whereby achievement 'against the odds' can take place "when motivated individuals decide that greater opportunities should be provided for children with special educational needs.

Table 2. Outcome space for parents of individuals with SEND

Aspiration
Normalisation
Care
Protection

At the simplest level, the parents of individuals with SEND expressed a need to protect people like Elena, basing this around concerns that 'she will be bullied and cast-out of society' (Female, aged 54) or that 'no one will understand her needs, there is no hope for children like her' (Male, 42). The qualitative difference between comments associated with notions of protection and those of care were evidenced in quotations such as 'well, she will need to be looked after by her parents and a psychologist so that her needs will be met' (Male, aged 28).

From care, some parents spoke of the potential for normalisation when 'people will see her like other children' (Male, aged 27) and that 'she will be accepted in Yerevan but possible not in other places but at least people in Yerevan will see her as normal' (Female, aged 43).

Finally, some parents, notably from Yerevan, talked in aspirational terms expressing 'hope for children like her, perhaps some people will recognise that she likes astronomy and help her to study that' (Female, aged 29). This response exemplifies the work of parent associations in Tajikistan, as described by Whitsel & Kodirov (2013), which, over the past ten years, has gained attention from the media and government around the rights to inclusive education for disabled children.

Table 3. Outcome space for citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues.

Acknowledgement / recognition of difference
Segregation
Low expectation

The majority of participants in this group commented that they had never met 'someone like this' (Female, aged 44), often expressing low expectations; none focussed upon Elena's interest in astronomy. Typical responses related to perceptions of her inability to 'socialise' (Male, aged 23) saying that 'it would be impossible for her to be part of society' (Female, aged 59). In some cases, this expectation was expressed in benevolent terms: 'she probably won't manage by herself' (Female, aged 40). Other respondents seemed more judgemental, with comments such as 'I don't know why schools should have to manage someone like this, she is never going to do well in school and should be in a special school with other children like her' (Male, aged 62).

Although some responses were more positive, members of this group demonstrated concern that she would not 'manage in a normal school' (Male, aged 35) and, at times, appeared to doubt her ability to cope with the work in a 'normal school' (Female, aged 21). All but one respondent suggested that she should be 'in a Special School or a Special Institution for people like her' (Female, aged 50) with some describing her as 'different' and as 'strange, she won't fit in' (Female, aged 41). This response more closely reflects the lack of community acceptance described by Hartblay & Ailchieva (2013) and Kokina & Bagdasarova

(2013) exhibiting the ghosts of "social norms from the past" (Lapham & Rouse, 2013) that inhabit post-Soviet contexts.

Finally, where citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues recognised and accepted Elena as 'different but a bit normal in some ways' (Female, aged 40) they did suggest that 'she should go to mainstream school with the help from a psychologist or special pedagogue' (Male, aged 24). Furthermore, some commented that 'you see more people like this in society nowadays; they aren't hidden away as much as they would have been 20 years ago' (Female, aged 57). If responses of this nature indicate changing perceptions, it could be argued that the cultural stigma of divine punishment or family dishonour offers opportunities for increased societal acceptance for those with SEND.

Table 4: Outcome space for student teachers

Social justice
Emerging inclusive philosophical stance
Acceptance of marginalisation

All student teachers involved in this study were based in Yerevan (due to this being the site of the only State Pedagogical University) and demonstrated an awareness of educational marginalisation, and, in some instances, concerns about widespread student exclusion. In each category, marginalisation was described in terms of a direct infringement on human rights, particularly towards individuals with SEND, and, in the first category – acceptance of marginalisation – responses indicated that marginalisation was perceived as an inevitable consequence of the system. For instance, one student teacher (male, aged 20) stated that Elena

'should be educated in her local school but they would probably want her to go to a special inclusive school', while another (female, aged 21) suggested a way forward, arguing that 'if the teachers were trained to understand her, she would need less individual help.' In this way, the student teachers illustrated frustration with respect to current practice and their lack of control within the system. This exasperation at the exclusionary nature of technologies of governance (Hartblay, 2014) was evident across the student teacher interviews.

Interestingly, many responses relating to the second category – emerging inclusive philosophical stance – made reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), suggesting that adherence to these international conventions was seen to be a crucial element of attaining equal opportunities and thus equitable progression. For example, one student commented that 'I think children like her have to study with others in inclusive schools, otherwise she will not become a part of society' (female, aged 21), and another that Elena should have 'The right to education and the right to be accepted as a member of the community' (male, aged 22).

Finally, the third category – social justice – was typified by assertions that Elena had 'full human rights as described by the UN convention' and, as a result, should be educated 'in any school' (female, aged 23). Importantly, in this category, student teachers were not only identifying social injustices, but were also illustrating that they were aware of the need to comply with international legislation. This is not to argue that the student teachers were ignorant of the challenge ahead but they did see themselves as part of the answer recognising

many of the professional barriers raised across the case studies presented by Rouse & Lapham, 2013).

Table 5: Outcome space for teachers

Concern
Practicality
Benign paternalism
Marginalisation

Serving teachers expressed rather less progressive attitudes towards the vignette than their student counterparts. In this regard, arguments were put forward for exclusion and segregation, where special schools were perceived as necessary aspects of both autistic individuals' development, and as preventative action for other students' learning being disrupted. For example, a comment typical of those that exemplified the first category – marginalisation – was that 'All children have the right to be educated and someone like Elena prevents the rights of the other children to receive education by her behaviour' (female teacher, aged 47). Responses of this nature are indicative of teacher attitudes across the globe; for example, in 2018 A House of Commons Education Committee into Schools Exclusions in England was scathing of the use of exclusion by schools commenting that:

'An unfortunate and unintended consequence of the Government's strong focus on school standards has led to school environments and practices that have resulted in disadvantaged children being disproportionately excluded, which includes a curriculum with a lack of focus on developing pupils' social and economic capital. There appears to be a lack of moral accountability on the part of

many schools and no incentive to, or deterrent to not, retain pupils who could be classed as difficult or challenging.' (p. 14).

The degree to which this situation is any more enlightened than the responses from Armenian teachers is debateable; certainly, the global West has little to offer in this example.

In similar responses, teachers expressed the notion that individuals such as Elena had the right to be educated and to receive specialist support but that this was not the role of 'normal schools' (female teacher, aged 52).

As an arguably progressive step, the second category is identified as benign paternalism; a viewpoint that limits the liberty of others to the alleged benefit of those whose rights are curtailed. Here we see that Elena's rights are said to include 'study in a special school' (male teacher, aged 30) where 'specialist professionals will understand her and not limit her freedom' (female teacher, aged 39).

The next category – practicality – is concerned with the logistics of support for individuals with autism and teachers in this category illustrated a greater propensity for perceiving autistic individuals as 'normal'. The practicalities involved with supporting Elena: 'schools need to provide support for her, in order to give the right assistance' (male teacher, aged 41), were related to her general 'right to learn' (female teacher, aged 30).

Finally, the fourth category – concern – represents responses that equated Elena's rights with the rights of everyone, particularly those rights deemed to be statutory. However, concern was expressed in relation to the implementation of such rights and thus with equality in education, with one participant expressing unease about the fact that 'we have some way to go before we become a civil society' (female teacher, aged 32).

Analysis of results - stage 2

The second stage of Phenomenographical analysis involves the creation of what could be described as a meta-analysis of the phase 1 outcome spaces by discerning the structural and referential constructs at play. Marton (1994) has designated the structural components of categories of description as the internal and external horizons of the subject's boundaries of awareness, which Andretta (2007: 156) interprets as "the person's total experience of the world at a given point in time". The referential components of categories of description represent the complexity of experience; in this case, from societal marginalisation to frustration about a system that fails to include individuals with SEND. In this way, more nuanced intersections become apparent when both the structural and referential components of each set of responses are explored.

Table 6 summarises the structural and referential framework interpreted from responses to the vignette, illuminating what each respondent group foregrounded along a continuum from marginalisation that foregrounds deficit to frustration at the oppression of Elena's potential by state, institutional and societal barriers.

Table 6: the primary relationships between the structural and referential components of each group of respondents.

Structural	Referential			
	Marginalisation	*Acceptance*	*Aspiration*	*Frustration*
Potential foreground		**Parents of individuals with SEND**	**Individuals with SEND**	**Student Teachers**
Deficit foreground	**Citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues**	**Teachers**		

The structural and referential composition of the experiences described by each participant group raises interesting questions about the social and cultural contexts of these experiences, and the ways in which each group interpreted the vignette and related this interpretation to Elena's human and educational rights. In all, whilst both individuals with SEND, and the parents of individuals with SEND foregrounded potential, the hope articulated by individuals with SEND could be viewed as reflecting a more emancipatory discourse than the aspirations expressed by parents.

Likewise, whilst the student teachers foregrounded potential and the teachers predominantly foregrounded deficit, the focus on potential expressed by student teachers could be described as a development of the focus on segregation expressed by serving teachers. In contrast, the marginalisation/deficit model gleaned by responses from citizens with no personal relationship to disability issues stand alone as the only group foregrounding both a marginalisation *and* a deficit model of representation.

Discussion

The range of responses evidenced here highlight a complex web of perceptions. By focussing on the structural and referential components of experience, it is possible to analyse both "the combination of features discerned and focussed upon by the subject" (Marton & Pong 2005: 336), and the "particular meaning of an individual object: anything delimited and attended to by subjects" (ibid: 336). A critique of these meanings gives some insight into the socio-cultural factors impacting upon those directly experiencing the cultural and political context in Armenia.

The referential composition of the responses of each participant group appear to reflect social rules and the historical development of social practices. Firstly, there is resonance, here, with what Phillips described as a two-pronged policy of care and control (2012). In this example, inherited conceptualisations of the worth of individuals with SEND, seems to have resulted in the forms of parental protectionism identified in the Tajikistan context (Whitsel & Kodirov, 2013) and levels of professional insecurity described in many of the Rouse and Lapham case studies (2013). Indeed, as social networks are a significant aspect of identity formation, it seems sensible to acknowledge that the impact of societal structures may constrain aspirations and agency. Nonetheless, by maintaining a societal status quo which is contrary to social justice, all social actors must accept their own potential complicity in the maintenance of exclusionary practices (author, 2016; Dinishak, 2016).

Secondly, the political and historic backdrop of this study highlights the need to understand "plural and new ways of being" (Veck 2009: 43). In this study, the multiplicity of human needs reflects immediate, rather than philosophical, priorities

in a context where the technologies of governance have, at their core, what Hartblay (2014) describes as an obsession with productivity. This middle ground, in a sense post-communism yet pre-neoliberalism, serves as an interesting counterpoint to contexts such as England or the US; if people with disabilities are marginalised in both contexts, the notion of inclusion appears to be, as has been argued, somewhat illusory (Atkins, 2016; Graham & Slee, 2008).

As a result, we would suggest that the wealth of questions around the degree to which neoliberalist agendas have damaged the social status of disabled people (see, for example, Allan, 2010; Ball, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2015) demand greater analysis. Indeed, Mladenov explores the impact of neoliberalism on disability policy in Bulgaria, as an example of a post-socialist context, with an invitation to reclaim the meaning of self-determination from the neoliberal mainstream (2015: 456).

Having gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia is still in the process of developing a national identity beyond the "ghosts of social norms and traditions" (Lapham & Rouse, 2013: 175). In comparison to the United Kingdom, the context within which Goodley and Runswick-Cole reflected upon the impact that neoliberalist agendas have on the status of disabled people, it could be argued that Armenia is yet to be encumbered by such concerns. Whilst pressure for the inclusion of disabled children in regular education settings can be seen to have begun in some countries in the 1960s, and grown through the 1970s and 1980s (Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller, 2011), other contexts, including the Republic of Armenia, are still in the process of adopting, as a matter of law or policy, the principle of enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (Mitchell, 2010). The next challenge is to analyse

how 'compelling reasons' are defined and enacted and what these definitions achieve in the real world (Goodlet & Runswick-Cole, 2015) where culture and education can be regarded as assets (Stangvik, 2014).

In addition, while the concept of inclusion may be ubiquitous and even dominant across educational discourses, it would be fair to say that an agreed meaning of either 'inclusion' or 'inclusive education' remains elusive (Atkins, 2016; Back,Keys, McMahon & ONeill, 2016). Given the temptation of those in the West to assume a unilinear and unidirectional transition from post-Soviet practices to Westernisation (Hartblay, 2014), there is a danger that practices in the global West are reified as inherently equitable. For example, in 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities produced a damning report following a review of the UK government's compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Far from being a world leader in disability equality, the UK government's record on upholding disabled people's rights was condemned by the Committee; one member went as far as calling this a "human catastrophe" (CSIE, 2017). Given that similar language was used in the UN reports documented at the beginning of this paper, any critique of the real world experiences of individuals in the Republic of Armenia should prompt questions about the lived experiences of individuals in countries that consider themselves to be leaders in disability equality.

Conclusion

Although sometimes unacknowledged, conventional ideas of research in the social sciences and humanities are often implicitly connected in one way or another to

the nation state (Fahey and Kenway, 2010: 113). Therefore, by examining practices in other national contexts, we create opportunities to turn a critical lens back on our own practice; "a lens that, in turn, enables a political reading of place and its socialities and relations of power" (ibid: 584). If we accept that disability is constructed in socially mediated processes, and is therefore culturally specific (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012; Avramidis, 2012), it might be argued that disability scholars must look beyond the most accessible national contexts.

To this end, it is worth considering whether the policies and practices associated with inclusion in our own national contexts result in, or collude with, the effective social and educational exclusion of young people with disabilities. It could be that the reality of practice in the Republic of Armenia offers an opportunity to reflect upon the degree to which, despite theoretical insights, countries in the 'developed' world have moved towards educational or societal inclusion for those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Soldatic & Grech, 2014). In response to Vehmas and Watson (2016: 13) this insight into the "societal and cultural reality in which disability is experienced" may go some way towards a greater understanding of the application of theoretical concepts in unfamiliar contexts. As such, it is incumbent upon disability scholars in the global West to demystify the language of inclusion and revisit what we think that we know about inclusive education.

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