Inclusive Education

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This chapter begins to explore the idea, and origins, of inclusive education and some of the very different ways the term is used in different contexts. We will consider the possible meanings and values which underpin these different interpretations, and how these relate to the lives of schools and their communities. The term 'communities' is used here to mean both the communities of people who make up the internal life of the school, and to refer to a wider concept of community which encompasses the lives, cultures, practices and interests of those in the neighbourhoods associated with the school. This discussion will be linked to the often contradictory demands made on all those implicated in the complex relationships involved in the lives of colleges and schools, learning and teaching. Teaching Assistants, teachers and pupils are at the sharp edge of where these contradictions are most keenly felt – in the day-to-day life of the classroom. In the course of the discussion the chapter will draw on some examples of research to raise some issues about the role of Teaching assistants in developing inclusive relationships and practices. It will end with some issues and questions which may be helpful in making connections between some of the points raised in the chapter and the particular challenges faced by those committed to developing inclusive education and who work in a support role in education.

In the light of the wide range of ways in which terminology is used, it is important, therefore, to clarify the ways we use language, and we need to recognise that inclusion means different things to different people. The starting point in this chapter is that there is a dynamic relationship between schools, communities and the broader social context. Tony Booth describes participation in the inclusive classroom in the following terms:

> It (...) implies learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared lessons. It involves active engagement with what is learnt and taught and having a say in how education is experiences. But participation also being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself: I participate with you when you recognise me as a person like yourself and accept me for who I am. (Booth 2003:2)

Inclusive education is a continuous and changing process, which is deeply affected by change in society – both short and long-term. Thus, the kinds of issues which a school needs to engage with may change dramatically in the face of any of the following: the closing down of a local factory; the outbreak of hostilities with another country; the closure of a local special school; a change in the political complexion of the country or the local council; the arrival of a group of refugees in the local community; the introduction of new structures and measures reinforcing processes of testing and assessment, or the government-led revision of an aspect of the curriculum. Many of these examples are ones which those working in education can relate to quite easily, and we can think of examples from our own experience which relate quite specifically to our own communities and work contexts. Inclusive education, then, is intrinsically related to the notions of context and community and raises questions for schools about the way in which they respond to change and diversity at both national and local level.

Inclusive education: origins and rights

Education is recognised as a basic human right by a number of United Nations instruments, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such instruments are not necessarily intended as guides for practice in particular settings, which all have their own unique characteristics, but they do provide a vision, a set of goals and expectations, which we can try and interpret in ways which reflect the barriers and opportunities relating to education within our own changing social settings. If we value all our citizens equally, and recognise their fundamental rights to equal participation and access to social wellbeing, we must ensure that all have equal access to education. However, it is apparent that national education systems exclude many children and young people, either by making inadequate or inappropriate provision, or sometimes by excluding them from education altogether. We need to explore the extent to which failure to participate fully in education is an outcome of policies and practices in education systems and in schools themselves, as well as broader questions relating to attitudes, resources and wider inequalities in society.

In 1990 the challenge of exclusion from education was first taken up on a global level by world leaders at The World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs and the World Summit on Children (New York, 1990) which adopted the goal of Education for All by the Year 2000.The World Declaration on Education for All emanating from the Jomtien Conference specifically refers to the need to provide equal access to education for all children, including those who have impairments or experience disadvantages. The Framework for Action adopted by the conference provided a set of principles in support of prompting "inclusive education" :

- the right of all children to a full cycle of primary education
- the commitment to a child-centred concept of education in which individual differences are accepted as a source of richness and diversity, a challenge not a problem

- the improvement of the quality of primary education including improvements in professional training
- the provision of a more flexible and responsive primary schooling, with respect to organisation, processes and content
- greater parental and community participation in education
- recognition of the wide diversity of needs and patterns of development of primary school children, demanding a wider and more flexible range of responses
- a commitment to a developmental, intersectoral and holistic approach to education and care of primary school children

The emphasis on *primary* education reflects the fact that in many countries of the world education may be restricted to the primary level, or even denied to some groups of children altogether. It is interesting to reflect on these principles in the light of our own policies and practices, and to ask: to what extent are we fulfilling, or falling short of, these principles in our own contexts? How should these principles be interpreted, and what would be the implications for changes in school cultures and practices?

The UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality held in Spain in 1994 focused on the practical requirements that need to be fulfilled in order for inclusive education to become a reality. It produced the Salamanca Statement which formulated a new Statement on Inclusive Education and adopted a new Framework for Action based on the principle that ordinary schools should welcome all children regardless of difference. It proclaimed that

> Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of

children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

<div align="right">(Unesco, 1994)</div>

The World Conference called upon all governments to:

- give the 'highest policy and budgetary priority' to improve education services so that all children could be included, regardless of differences or difficulties.
- adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education' and enrol all children in ordinary schools unless there were compelling reasons for doing otherwise.
- develop demonstration projects and encourage exchanges with countries with inclusive schools.
- ensure that organisations of disabled people, along with parents and community bodies, are involved in planning decision-making.
- put greater effort into pre-school strategies as well as vocational aspects of inclusive education.
- ensure that both initial and in-service teacher training address the provision of inclusive education.

In particular, the Framework for Action is based on the belief that 'inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights.' In the field of education this is reflected in bringing about a 'genuine equalisation of opportunity.' Inclusive Education

> ...assumes human differences are normal and that learning must be adapted to the needs of the child, rather than the child fitted to the process. The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, where possible, and that ordinary schools

must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, while also having a continuum of support and services to match these needs. Inclusive schools are the 'most effective' at building solidarity between children with special needs and their peers.

(The UNESCO Salamanca Statement [1994], as summarised by the Centre for Studies in inclusive Education)

This statement is now nearly 25 years old – and yet in the UK we are still a long way from fulfilling these aspirations – and some would argue that the increasing competition and selection in our education system, and the widening gap between levels of income, have actually increased divisions and restricted opportunities for many.

Inclusive education: meanings and interpretations

In this chapter, the use of the term inclusive education reflects the principle that inclusion concerns everybody - all learners, and all members of the school, college and wider community. Inclusion is

...fundamentally about issues of human rights, equity, social justice and the struggle for a non-discriminatory society. These principles are at the heart of inclusive policy and practice.

(Armstrong and Barton, 2007)

It is based on the belief in the rights of all to equal recognition, respect and treatment, regardless of difference. This does not mean that particular interests, learning styles, knowledge, and cultural and linguistic heritage shall not be recognised. On the contrary – inclusion recognises, and is responsive to, diversity and the right 'to be oneself' – in an open and democratic community. This interpretation of inclusive education implies the right for all to be an equal member of their neighbourhood school and college communities. This is a rather different from the concept of 'integration' which focuses on the

question of how an individual child, or group of children, might 'fit in' to a school or a class, rather than focusing on the need for a fundamental transformation in the social, cultural, curricular and pedagogic life of the school, as well as its physical organisation. Integration has, traditionally, referred to a concept and practices associated with learners identified as 'having special educational needs'. Paradoxically, the term 'inclusion' is often used in the same way as integration. For example, it is common to hear children referred to as 'being included' in a certain activity for part of the week, or to mean they attend a special school or unit but attend a mainstream school or class as *visitors* on particular days. This creates some confusion, as integration and inclusion represent very different values and practices. The key difference between the concept of inclusion and the concept of integration is that *integration* focuses on the perceived deficits in the child as creating barriers to participation, whereas *inclusion situates the barriers to participation within the school of college.*

A further muddle is created by the way policy documents sometimes adopt the language of inclusion to refer to 'raising standards' in terms of improving exam results which, in turn, is linked to 'widening participation'. Over the past quarter century there has been a series of contradictory policies emanating from successive governments which have often been deeply confusing in terms of issues of equity and participation. For example – the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced a National Curriculum and national testing of pupils at ages 7, 11 and 14 and the publication of league tables and inspection reports on schools. The effects of this major piece of legislation was to strengthen competition betweens schools and to sharpen processes of the selection of pupils. But there were other, more positive, outcomes of the Act because it also gave *all* pupils an entitlement to access the National Curriculum, including children and young people enrolled in special schools. Much of the legislation introduced by recent governments have been concerned with measurable performance and raising attainment as part of an overall strategy

for *school improvement*. The pressures of a highly competitive global economy are one factor in creating this climate of 'performativity'. Unfortunately, when 'high standards' in education are measured primarily by levels achieved in public tests and examinations, other broader educational and creative concerns and projects become marginalised, as well as creating perceptions of 'failure' in relation to children and young people whose attainment is deemed unacceptably low. The implications for students who experience difficulties in learning in the present educational regime and climate relate to low-self esteem, marginalisation and a lack of recognition in terms of who they are and what they have to contribute.

Although a number of policy documents over the past decade have specifically linked school improvement and raising standards to 'inclusive education', these are not linked to questions of equity, fairness and the overall ethos and practices of the school or college. Indeed, the overriding concern with 'raising standards' which has dominated the education system at all levels (Gewirtz, 2002) can create a barrier to 'equity, the valuing of diversity and inclusive education' (Florian and Rouse, 2005), rather than opening up wider opportunities for recognising and celebrating the knowledge, cultures and experiences of all students as a central part of teaching and learning. Ainscow et al (2006) show, through their research, how the 'pressure to improve scores on national tests' may *distort* the work of schools – including those who have demonstrated a strong commitment to developing inclusive policies and practices. However, Rose and Florian (2005) found in their research that 'many schools committed to the development of inclusive practice have been able to mediate these tensions, and work creatively and successfully...' to build schools which are 'effective' in terms of developing inclusive cultures and practices, and also 'effective' in terms of raising levels of attainment.

The government policy on the education of 'Gifted and Talented' students exemplifies some of the contradictions and confusions surrounding questions of participation and equity. It raises questions such as: is it 'fair' that some children should be identified as having special 'gifts and talents' and that extra resources should be released to provide 'enrichment' activities for these children? What effect does such a policy have on the 10% identified, and the 90% considered *not* to have 'gifts and talents'? Don't all children possess unique 'gifts' and characteristics worthy of celebration, and don't they all deserve educational and creative 'enrichment' opportunities? Does the notion that 10% of children are 'gifted and talented' (the government's figure) bear any relationship to the rich diversity of 'gifts and talents' spread across all school and college populations? One argument sometimes put forward by teachers and policy makers is that this policy is justified on the grounds that more children in economically disadvantaged communities are getting opportunities to be involved in activities which they would not have had otherwise. Some schools use the money allocated for 'gifted and talented' pupils to 'enrich' the learning opportunities for *all* their pupils (see Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006, p 66). The government's 'gifted and talented' agenda illustrates some of the possible conflicts and contradictions embedded in many policy initiatives if considered from an inclusive education perspective.

Another example of possible conflicts in values relates to one implication of the 'raising standards' agenda which is an increase in setting and in primary and secondary schools, with children being categorised and labelled at an increasingly young age, and placed in different groups according to perceived ability. Teaching assistants often work with children who experience difficulties in the classroom and find themselves placed alongside them in 'bottom sets'! Interestingly, recent research suggests that grouping students for core curriculum subjects (English, Maths and Science) according to perceived ability is not necessarily effective in raising standards of attainment overall (Ireson, Hallam and Hurley, 2005). Other within-school factors which

may have an impact on student attainment include the type and quality of learning and teaching opportunities provided, curriculum differentiation, teacher attitudes and expectations – as well as pupils' own sense of self-worth and confidence. These factors all relate to policy and school organisation, values and practices and concern the work of Teaching assistants, and all those involved in teaching, learning and the life of the school.

What can we learn from research?

The rapidly increasing number of teaching assistants working in schools over recent years, and the emphasis on work-based learning as part of professional development, has led to a greater interest in this neglected area on the part of researchers. In this section some of this work will be discussed particularly with reference to the question of the development of inclusive schools and classrooms.

In order for Teaching assistants to work effectively and comfortably with other adults and with children and young people, their work and their diverse wider role, and the particular skills and knowledge which they contribute, need to be recognised. The work of those working in a 'support' role has been marginalised both in schools and in research. Sometimes even the language used to refer to those who work in a support role is devaluing or instrumental. It is quite common to come across the terms 'deployment' or 'use' of teaching assistants or learning support staff in policy documents, reports, academic articles and professional literature[1] (although rarely, I suspect, in schools themselves).

One of the most fundamental aspects of transforming schools and colleges is the need to challenge existing inequalities in the way different people are

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[1] For example, the report *The Employment and Deployment of Teaching Assistants*, NFER News, Spring 2004, p 5

valued and receive recognition, and this has to be the case for *all* members of the community if inclusive cultures and practices are to be developed. In the past, those working in a 'support role' have often been the subject of 'patterns of discrimination' which are pervasive and go 'far beyond' salary levels and conditions of service (Lorenz, 1998).

Significantly, there is increasing recognition of the crucial role played by Teaching assistants in developing inclusive practices and cultures (Moran and Abbott (2002). This will come as no surprise to those who actually work in schools! Democratic collaboration and teamwork is essential in developing inclusive practices and planning, and this involves everybody being able to express their views and recognition given to the knowledge and experience of all participants. This is not easily accomplished in schools where professional relationships are deeply hierarchical or where there is not tradition of consultation and debate.

The question of the nature of 'support' provided by both Teaching assistants and teachers themselves has been the subject of much debate. Should support for learning be provided on an individual basis or does this encourage dependency and lack of motivation among pupils, as well as creating barriers to social interaction with other learners? In her study of working practices of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) working with students identified as having 'severe learning difficulties' and 'profound and multiple learning difficulties', Lacey (2001) concluded that the most effective practices in developing 'inclusive learning' involved the following:

- allowing opportunities for social interaction to take place between students
- making time available for LSAs and teachers to plan together
- supporting groups of children, rather than individuals

In this study the importance or recognising and drawing on the knowledge and experience of LSAs emerged as an important requirement for inclusion.

Much of the research relating to learning support assistants and classroom assistants highlight the crucial importance of the *relationships* which are formed between the different groups involved in the life of the school and in teaching and learning. Hammett and Burton (2005) observe that the failure to value, and ensure the participation of, support staff can lead to feelings of demoralisation and demotivation. Their research was carried out in an 'improving' 11-18 secondary school in which 'Learning Support Assistants' (the term used in the article) are seen as 'prime supporters of the renewed emphasis on improving teaching and learning'. They argue that there needs to be more opportunities for communication between teachers and Learning Support Assistants (the term used in this article) and this means providing time and resources to make this possible (by paying Learning Support Assistants for their time spent attending meetings, for example).

Another important issue is the question of *how* support workers relate to individual students and the wider class. The interpretation of inclusive education as being concerned with learners identified as 'having special educational needs' is supported by a view of the role of support staff as supporting individual students, or groups of students, identified as having difficulties (and often with a statement). Yet, research suggests that there is a general awareness amongst teachers, learning support staff, pupils and researchers that the practice of individual support presents a number of difficulties and barriers to inclusion. Vincent et al (2005) point out that concentration of attention on students who have been identified as having special educational needs, can encourage social, academic and physical dependence. It can also prevent interaction between students, leading to the isolation of the 'supported' student and the possible creation of negative perceptions.

Earlier in this chapter we briefly considered the possible tensions and barriers to inclusion created by pressures to 'raise standards' in performance in tests and examinations. Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) carried out detailed, collaborative action research with a network of 25 schools, involving three LEAs and a hundred teachers, into 'ways of identifying and overcoming barriers to participation and learning' (p 51). Although their research explores the difficulties and barriers to inclusive education with clarity and honesty, it is encouraging in that it reveals some strengths and possibilities in the development of some existing practices identified in the research process concerning collaboration within, and between, schools. Importantly, their study emphasises the importance of discussion of questions of values, purposes of participation, social justice and the purposes of education across all sectors of the education system, and this discussion must involve *everybody.*

On a smaller scale, work carried out by practitioners in their own work contexts, reveals the importance of listening to the voices of children and young people in order to understand their experiences and the nature of the barriers which they face, or that they identify in the daily life of the classroom. Those who are determined to address inequalities may think they have a clear idea about what needs to be done, but inclusion is not something which can be imposed, but must be based on the views of all those involved, including children and young people themselves.

In her chapter 'We talk and we like someone to listen', Mary Clifton insists on the importance of listening to the voices of international children (Clifton, M., 2004). She carried out a small project with Dell, an 11-year-old from Thailand who came to England with her sister and mother, in which she sought Dell's views on her experience of education and what she found helpful and – importantly – not helpful. A young bilingual learning support assistant also contributed to the research. By listening to Dell's views, Mary learnt a great deal about Dell's experience which challenged her existing assumptions about

the needs and interests of children arriving in schools in Britain from very different cultures. First and foremost, she began to re-assess the role of attitudes and practices in schools, and the way they affect opportunities for a young person who is new to England and does not speak the language. She also began to understand the importance of the role played by the peer group in developing inclusion.

In her collaborative enquiry with a group of teaching assistants, Cath Sorsby and her co-researchers (Sorsby, 2004) identified some key factors in the development of inclusive practices, including the need for:

- a shift in the culture and the values of the school
- understanding that barriers to participation are created by policies, practices and attitudes, rather than by "something wrong with the child"
- a "problem-solving" approach to creating a curriculum for success, rather than following one that highlights failure
- a recognition of each persons strengths, and learning styles as well as recognising and difference and diversity and providing a rich and responsive learning environment for all
- joint professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants and others involved in learning and teaching
- time for discussion and joint preparation
- a whole school commitment to bringing about change

The Inclusive School

What would the inclusive school look like? What direction do we need to be taking? What goals should we be moving towards? It is important to recognise that there is not a blueprint for inclusive education. Every school will develop their own unique cultures and responses to their particular communities, but the important thing is that there are some clearly identifiable principles at work which underpin the structure, organisation and practices of the school, its

ethos and its relationship with all communities in the neighbourhood. An inclusive school will:

- be accessible to all: physically, culturally and pedagogically
- be a school in which the voices of all members are heard and listened too
- engage is critical reflection through a review of values of practices
- develop new ways of working through consultation and with the participation of all those involved
- critically examine the curriculum and teaching practices, and seek the views of pupils on their learning
- value what every person brings to the school community
- have understandable equal opportunities policies and practices which are explained in meaningful ways and which apply to everybody
- get to know the local community and build and develop links with all communities in the neighbourhood
- develop democratic practices for running all aspects of the school through, for example, the setting up of school councils.
- recognise and respect differences

Reflections on values and practices

Inclusive education is both a set of 'ideals' and a project based on values and practices which recognise the right of all to belong. The inclusive school will, for example, try and counter oppressive beliefs and behaviours relating to racism, sexuality, class and narrow notions of conformity. It will attempt to learn as a community to understand and overcome inequalities, bullying, and marginalising practices which are part of the everyday life of many school communities. The inclusive school is democratic so everybody has a voice and contributes to decision-making and the planning of teaching and learning.

The values and principles discussed in this chapter raise questions about the policies, practices and relationships which might foster inclusive schools and colleges. With this in mind, what kinds of changes are needed in your own work context, or local school, in order to develop an inclusive community in which all are valued equally, and participate fully in life of the school? What are the barriers to change? What contribution can teaching assistants make to creating inclusive education?

Suggested Further Reading

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