

## **SOME LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO FOSTER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyses international developments aimed at finding ways of including all children and young people in schools. In doing so, it addresses three overall questions: what forms of classroom practice can help all children to participate and learn? How can such practices be developed? And, what does this mean for school organisation and leadership? The paper argues that schools already have much of the expertise that is needed to support the participation and learning of all of their students. This being the case, the logical starting points for inclusive development within a school are through a detailed analysis of existing practice and with the sharing of expertise amongst staff members. The paper suggests five propositions that can be used to guide actions to make school systems more inclusive.

**Keywords:** *inclusive practices; school development; leadership.*

### **RESUMEN**

Este artículo analiza los progresos internacionales destinados a encontrar maneras de incluir a todos los niños y jóvenes en las escuelas. Al hacerlo, surgen tres cuestiones generales: ¿qué tipos de prácticas en el aula pueden ayudar a todos los niños a participar y aprender? ¿Cómo pueden desarrollarse estas prácticas? Y, ¿qué implicaciones suponen para la organización escolar y el liderazgo? En el artículo se sostiene que las escuelas ya tienen gran parte de la experiencia que se necesita para apoyar la participación y el aprendizaje de todos sus estudiantes. Así las cosas, los puntos de partida lógicos para el desarrollo inclusivo dentro de una escuela pasan por un análisis detallado de las prácticas existentes y por el intercambio de conocimientos entre el profesorado. El artículo sugiere cinco proposiciones que pueden ser usadas para guiar las acciones que hagan más inclusivos a los sistemas escolares.

**Palabras clave:** Prácticas inclusivas; desarrollo de la escuela; liderazgo

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper I review evidence from international developments regarding ways of including all children and young people in schools. In particular, I address the following strategic questions: what forms of classroom practice can help all children to participate and learn? How can such practices be developed? And, what does this mean for school organisation and leadership? This leads me to develop a series of propositions that can be used to guide developments in the field.

## INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

**Special needs education.** It has been argued that the approaches developed as part of what is now often referred to as special needs education have, despite good intentions, continued to create barriers to progress as schools have been encouraged to adopt them (Ainscow, 1999; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010; Slee, 1996). Furthermore, researchers who have reviewed the empirical basis of specialised methods for particular categories of students conclude that there is little support for a separate special needs pedagogy (Davis & Florian, 2004; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2010). Put simply, effective teaching is effective teaching for all students. Indeed, it has been suggested that the existence of what are seen as specialised pedagogies further marginalise and exclude children with difficulties (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). However, while agreeing with this assertion, Davis and Florian (2004) conclude that this does not diminish the need for specialist expertise, a theme which I address in a later section.

At the same time, it has been argued that the preoccupation with individualised responses that have been a feature of special needs education, continue to deflect attention away from the creation of forms of teaching that can reach out to all learners within a class and the establishment of school conditions that will encourage such developments (Ainscow, 1997). This may help to explain why integration efforts that are dependent upon the importing of practices from special education tend to foster the development of yet new, more subtle forms of segregation, albeit within the mainstream settings. So, for example, in some countries recent years have seen the introduction of teaching assistants who work alongside class teachers in order to facilitate the presence of those students categorised as having special needs (Balshaw, 1999). It has been found that often when such support is withdrawn, teachers feel that they can no longer cope. Meanwhile, the requirement for individualised education plans in some countries has encouraged school leaders to feel that many more children will require such responses, thus creating budget problems within education systems (Ainscow, Farrell & Tweddle, 2000). At the same time, in some countries the category 'special educational needs' has become a repository for various groups who suffer discrimination in society, such as those from minority backgrounds (Trent, Artiles & Englert, 1998). In this way special education can be a way of hiding discrimination against some groups of students behind an apparently benign label, thus, justifying their low attainments and, therefore, their need for separate educational arrangements.

**An inclusive pedagogy.** The recognition that inclusive schools will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking and practice into mainstream contexts points to other possibilities. Many of these relate to the need to move to a perspective that seeks to 'personalise' learning through an engagement with the whole class (Ainscow, 1999). In this sense, many ideas about effective teaching are relevant. However, what is particular to an inclusive pedagogy is the way in which teachers conceptualise notions of difference.

As Bartolome (1994) explains, teaching methods are neither devised nor implemented in a vacuum. Design, selection and use of particular teaching approaches and strategies arise from perceptions about learning and learners. In this respect, she argues, even the most pedagogically advanced methods are likely to be ineffective in the hands of those who implicitly or explicitly

subscribe to a belief system that regards some students, at best, as disadvantaged and in need of fixing, or, worse, as deficient and, therefore, beyond fixing.

So, for example, a recent study by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2010) suggests that differentiation in a classroom - for example, through some students being expected to complete simpler or less work, or working with a teaching assistant - leads to students seeing other students as different. The danger, too, is that where a teacher sets tasks at a level seen to be appropriate to individual students, this effectively puts a ceiling on what they can achieve. Florian and Black-Hawkins suggest what they see as a more inclusive approach, where teachers create options for students to choose 'how, where, when and with whom they learn', in conditions that are designed to respond to their individual needs. The authors also suggest that students should be trusted to make decisions and have more control over their own learning.

**The nature of practice.** In thinking about such suggestions, we have to be sensitive to day-to-day demands on teachers and, indeed, the complex nature of their work. Reflecting on their observations of classroom practices in Germany, Japan and the USA, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) argue that teaching should not be seen as a loose mixture of individual features 'thrown together' by individual practitioners. Rather, they suggest, the practice of a teacher 'works like a machine', with the different elements being interconnected. This means that individual features of practice only make sense in relation to the whole.

Commenting on this formulation, Hargreaves (2003) suggests that teaching practices take the form of 'scripts' that are deeply embedded within teachers, reflecting their life experiences and taken-for-granted assumptions. Consequently, changing one or two features of practice is unlikely to lead to significant improvements in teaching quality, since such superficial changes will leave most elements of the original script undisturbed.

Current thinking in cognitive psychology emphasises the idea that learning is a personal process of meaning-making, with each participant in an event 'constructing' their own version of that shared experience (Lewis & Norwich, 2005; Udvari-Solner, 1996). The implication is that even in what might be seen as a rather traditional lesson, with little apparent concession being made by the teacher to the individual differences of members of the class, each student experiences and defines the meaning of what occurs in their own way. Interpreting the experience in terms of their own mental frames, individuals construct forms of knowledge which may or may not relate to the purposes and understandings of the teacher. Recognising this personal process of meaning-making leads the teacher to have to include in their lesson plans opportunities for self-reflection in order that class members can be encouraged to engage with and make a personal record of their own developing understandings (Black & William, 1998).

**Responding to diversity.** Observations of planning processes used by teachers who seem to be effective in responding to diversity suggest certain patterns (Ainscow, 1999, 2003; Hopkins, Ainscow & West, 1994). Usually experienced teachers have developed a range of lesson formats that become their repertoire and from which they create arrangements that they judge to be appropriate to a particular purpose. Here they may take account of a range of inter-connected factors, such as the subject to be taught, the age and experience of the class, the environmental conditions of the

classroom, the available resources and their own mood, in order to adapt one of their usual lesson outlines. Such planning tends to be rather idiosyncratic and, indeed, often seems to be conducted at a largely intuitive level. In this sense it is unlike the systematic procedures introduced to student teachers during their training. Rather, it consists, to a large degree, of an on-going process of designing and redesigning established patterns.

Much of this planning goes on incidentally in the background as teachers go about their day-to-day business. Indeed, final adjustments may still be made as the teacher enters the classroom and judges the mood of the class. It is also essential to recognise that planning does not conclude when the lesson commences. Indeed, often the most significant decisions are those that are made as the lesson proceeds, through what have been characterised as a process of improvisation (Ainscow, 1999) or 'tinkering' (Huberman, 1993).

Hart (1996) has developed a helpful framework that can be used by teachers to probe more rigorously and systematically into classroom situations that have not previously responded to their intuitive responses. Her approach, which she calls 'innovative thinking', is a means of generating new ideas to support children learning. It is based on what she defines as five 'interpretive modes'. These are: *making connections* (i.e. 'What contextual influences might have a bearing on the child's responses?'); *contradictions* (i.e. 'How else might this response be understood?'); *taking a child's eye view* (i.e. 'What meaning and purpose does this activity have for the child?'); *noting the impact of feelings* (i.e. 'How do I feel about this? What do these feelings tell me about what is going on here?'); and *suspending judgement* (i.e. 'This move involves recognising that we lack information on resources to have confidence in our judgements, and therefore holding back from making judgements about the child's needs while we take steps to acquire further resources.'). Drawing on evidence from her classroom trials, she demonstrates how, together, these questions can be used to develop the 'thinking-on-the-feet' that teachers carry out within lessons in order to identify further possibilities for responding to student differences.

**Cooperation in the classroom.** Beyond improvisation, tinkering and thinking-on-the-feet, research indicates that a feature of lessons that are effective in encouraging student participation is the way available resources, particularly human resources, are used to support learning. In particular, there is strong evidence of the potential of approaches that encourage cooperation between students for creating classroom conditions that can both maximise participation, whilst at the same time achieving high standards of learning for all members of a class (e.g. Thousand, Villa & Nevin, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1998). Furthermore, this evidence suggests that the use of such practices can be an effective means of supporting the involvement of 'exceptional students', e.g. those who are new to a class; children from different cultural backgrounds; and those with disabilities. However, it is important to stress again the need for skill in orchestrating this type of classroom practice. Poorly managed cooperative group work usually involves considerable waste of time and, indeed, present many opportunities for increased disruption.

Given the strengths of the arguments for cooperative learning it would be reasonable to assume that the use of such approaches would be widespread. However, there is evidence that this is not the case (Alexander, 2010). In English primary schools, for example, there has been a long tradition of discovery learning and problem-solving within the curriculum. Consequently it

might be expected that teachers would make considerable use of approaches that require students to work collaboratively on common tasks or activities. In fact, whilst it is common to see children in primary schools sitting around tables in groups, a closer look confirms that often they are working on individualised tasks. In this sense they may be getting the worst of both worlds. Individual work requires concentration that may well be disturbed as a result of incidental group discussion that are encouraged by such seating arrangements.

Here we can learn much from developments in economically poorer countries of the South, where limitations of resources have led to a recognition of the potential of 'peer power' through the development of so-called 'child-to-child' programmes (Hawes, 1988). Such experiences suggest that children are themselves an under-used resource that can be mobilised to overcome barriers to participation in lessons and contribute to improved learning opportunities for all members of a class. Interestingly, it should be noted that the essential resources for this to take effect are already there in any classroom. In this sense, the larger the class the more potential resources that are available. The important factor is the teacher's ability to mobilise this largely untapped energy. This takes us on to the question of how teachers can be helped to develop such ways of working.

**Proposition 1:** Inclusive classroom practices involve mobilising available human resources in order to overcome barriers to participation and learning

## DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

**The role of inquiry.** In the United Kingdom two recent studies have looked closely at how practices that respond effectively to learner diversity develop. Significantly, both projects involved researchers in working collaboratively with practitioners.

The first study, *Learning without Limits*, examined ways of teaching that are free from pre-determined assumptions about the abilities of students within a class (Hart, 2003; Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004). The researchers worked closely with a group of teachers who had rejected ideas of fixed ability, in order to study their practice. They started from the belief that constraints are placed on children's learning by ability-focused practices that lead young children to define themselves in comparison to their peers.

The researchers argue that the notion of ability as inborn intelligence has come to be seen as 'a natural way of talking about children' that summarises their perceived differences. They go on to suggest that, in England, national policies reflect this assumption, making it essential for teachers to compare, categorise and group their students by ability in order to provide appropriate and challenging teaching for all. So, for example, school inspectors are expected to check that teaching is differentiated for 'more able', 'average' and 'less able' student. In this context, what is meant by ability is not made explicit, leaving scope for teachers to interpret what is being recommended in ways that suit their own beliefs and views. However, it is noted that that the policy emphasis on target setting and value added measures of progress leave little scope for teachers who reject the fixed view of measurable ability to hold on to their principles.

Through examining closely the practices and thinking of their teacher partners, the researchers set themselves the task of identifying 'more just and empowering' ways of making sense of learner diversity. In summary, this would, they argue, involve teachers treating patterns of achievement and response in a 'spirit of transformability', seeking to discover what is possible to enhance the capacity of each child in their class to learn and to create the conditions in which their learning can more fully and effectively flourish.

Hart and her colleagues explain that the teachers in their study based their practices on a strong conviction that things can change and be changed for the better, recognizing that whatever a child's present attainments and characteristics, given the right conditions, everybody's capacity for learning can be enhanced. Approaching their work with this mind-set, the teachers involved in the study were seen to analyse gaps between their aspirations for children and what was actually happening.

The second study, *Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools*, also pointed to the importance of inquiry as a stimulus for changing practices. It involved 25 schools in exploring ways of developing inclusion in their own contexts, in collaboration with university researchers (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2004; Ainscow et al, 2003; Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). Significantly, this process took place in the context of the British government's extensive efforts to improve standards in public education, as measured by test and examination scores. This has involved the creation of an educational 'market-place', coupled with an emphasis on policies fostering greater diversity between types of school. The result is a quasi-selective system in which the poorest children, by and large, attend the lowest-performing schools - similar policy trends are evident in a number of other developed countries, not least in the United States (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

However, despite this apparently unfavourable national policy context, what was noted in the schools that participated in the study was neither the crushing of inclusion by the so-called standards agenda, nor the rejection of the standards agenda in favour of a radical, inclusive alternative. Certainly, many teachers were concerned about the impacts on their work of the standards agenda and some were committed to views of inclusion which they saw as standing in contradiction to it. However, in most of the schools, the two agendas remained intertwined. Indeed, the focus on attainment appeared to prompt some teachers to examine issues in relation to the achievements and participation of marginalised groups that they had previously overlooked. Likewise, the concern with inclusion tended to shape the way the school responded to the imperative to raise standards.

In trying to make sense of the relationship between external imperatives and the processes of change in schools, the study drew on the ideas of Wenger (1998) to reveal how external agendas were mediated by the norms and values of the 'communities of practice' within schools, and how they become part of a dialogue whose outcomes can be more rather than less inclusive. In this way, the role of national policy emerges from the study in something of a new light. This suggests that schools may be able to engage with what might appear to be unfavourable policy imperatives to produce outcomes that are by no means inevitably non-inclusive.

Together the findings of these two studies lead to reasons for optimism. They indicate that more inclusive approaches can emerge from a study of the existing practice of teachers, set within the internal social dynamics of schools. They also suggest that it is possible to intervene in these dynamics in order to open up new possibilities for moving policy and practice forward.

**Developing practice.** Research suggests that developments of practice are unlikely to occur without some exposure to what teaching actually looks like when it is being done differently, and exposure to someone who can help teachers understand the difference between what they are doing and what they aspire to do (Elmore, Peterson & McCarthy, 1996). It also suggests that this has to be addressed at the individual level before it can be solved at the organisational level. Indeed, there is evidence that increasing collaboration without some more specific attention to change at the individual level can simply result in teachers coming together to reinforce existing practices, rather than confronting the difficulties they face in different ways (Lipman, 1997).

At the heart of the processes in schools where changes in practice do occur is the development of a common language with which colleagues can talk to one another and, indeed, to themselves, about detailed aspects of their practice (Huberman, 1993). Without such a language teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities. As I have explained, much of what teachers do during the intensive encounters that occur is carried out at an automatic, intuitive level. Furthermore, there is little time to stop and think. This is why having the opportunity to see colleagues at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop more inclusive practices. It is through shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). It is also the means whereby space is created within which taken-for-granted assumptions about particular groups of learners can be subjected to mutual critique.

This raises questions about how best to introduce such ways of working. Here a promising approach is that of ‘lesson study’, a systematic procedure for the development of teaching that is well established in Japan and some other Asian countries (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Lo, Yan & Pakey, 2005; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). The goal of lesson study is to improve the effectiveness of the experiences that the teachers provide for all of their students. The core activity is collaboration on a shared area of focus that is generated through discussion. The content of this focus is the planned lesson, which is then used as the basis of gathering data on the quality of experience that students receive. These ‘study lessons’ are used to examine the teachers’ practices and the responsiveness of the students to the planned activities. Members of the group work together to design the lesson plan, which is then implemented by each teacher. Observations and post-lesson conferences are arranged to facilitate the improvement of the research lesson between each trial.

**Creating interruptions.** Other research has further confirmed how the use of evidence to study teaching can help to foster the development of more inclusive teaching (Ainscow, Howes, Farrell & Frankham, 2003; Miles & Ainscow, 2011). Specifically, it can help to create space for reappraisal and rethinking by interrupting existing discourses, and by focusing attention on overlooked possibilities for moving practice forward. Particularly powerful techniques in this respect involve the use of mutual observation, sometimes through video recordings (Ainscow, 1999, 2003),

and evidence collected from students about teaching and learning arrangements within a school (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2006; Messiou, 2006; Miles & Kaplan, 2005). Under certain conditions such approaches provide *interruptions* that help to make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action. In so doing they can sometimes lead to a reframing of perceived problems that, in turn, draws the teacher's attention to overlooked possibilities for addressing barriers to participation and learning.

Here my argument is informed by the work of Robinson (1998) who suggests that practices are activities that solve problems in particular situations. This means that to explain a practice is to reveal the problem for which it serves as a solution. So, in working closely with practitioners, inferences can be made about how teachers have formulated a problem and the assumptions that are involved in the decisions made. Research has also shown how initial formulations are sometimes rethought as a result of an engagement with various forms of evidence (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006; Hart, 1996)

However, such inquiry-based approaches to the development of inclusive practices are far from straight forward. An interruption that is created as a group of teachers engage with evidence may not necessarily lead to a consideration of new ways of working. Studies have documented examples of how deeply held beliefs within schools may prevent the experimentation that is necessary in order to foster the development of more inclusive ways of working (Howes & Ainscow, 2006, Ainscow & Kaplan, 2006). This reminds us that that it is easy for educational difficulties to be pathologised as difficulties inherent within students. This is true not only of students with disabilities and those defined as having special educational needs, but also of those whose socioeconomic status, race, language and gender renders them problematic to particular teachers in particular schools. Consequently, it is necessary to explore ways of developing the capacity of those within schools to reveal and challenge deeply entrenched deficit views of 'difference', which define certain types of students as 'lacking something' (Trent et al, 1998). This involves being vigilant in scrutinising how deficit assumptions may be influencing perceptions of certain students.

**School cultures.** This, in turn, points to the importance of cultural factors within a school. Schein (1985) suggests that cultures are about the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. The extent to which these values include the acceptance and celebration of difference, and a commitment to offering educational opportunities to all students, coupled with the extent to which they are shared across a school staff, relate to the extent to which students are enabled to participate and learn (Kugelmass, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Hargreaves (1995) argues that, within schools, cultures can be seen as having a reality-defining function, enabling those involved to make sense of themselves, their actions and their environment. A current reality-defining function of culture, he suggests, is often a problem-solving function inherited from the past. In this way, today's cultural form, created to solve an emergent problem, often becomes tomorrow's taken-for-granted recipe for dealing with matters shorn of their novelty.



Changing the norms that exist within a school is difficult to achieve, particularly within a context that is faced with so many competing pressures and where practitioners tend to work alone in addressing the problems they face (Fullan, 1991). On the other hand, the presence of children who are not suited to the existing ‘menu’ of the school can provide some encouragement to explore a more collaborative culture within which teachers support one another in experimenting with new teaching responses. In this way, problem-solving activities gradually become the reality-defining, taken-for-granted functions that are the culture of a school that is more geared to fostering inclusive ways of working. At the same time, this can make an important contribution to the development of schools that will be effective for all children (Ainscow, 1999)

The implication of all of this is that becoming more inclusive is a matter of thinking and talking, reviewing and refining practice, and making attempts to develop a more inclusive culture. Such a conceptualisation means that we cannot divorce inclusion from the contexts within which it is developing, nor the social relations that might sustain or limit that development (Dyson, 2006). It is in the complex interplay between individuals, and between groups and individuals, that shared beliefs and values exist, and change, and it is impossible to separate those beliefs from the relationships in which they are embodied.

**Proposition 2:** An engagement with various kinds of evidence can be a powerful driver for encouraging teachers to develop more inclusive practices

## SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

**Forms of support.** Conceptualising inclusive education as involving a process of teaching for diversity raises questions regarding what forms of additional support are needed for individual students. This also has implications for the roles of specialist staff.

Internationally, a variety of approaches for providing support for individual students with special educational needs are evident (Ainscow, 1999) Each of these has potential advantages and disadvantages. For example, a study of the role of specialist teachers in Finland, carried out by Takala et al (2009), notes the use of three approaches:

1. *One to one individual teaching with a special education teacher* – whilst this was seen as effective in giving focused attention, it also raised some concerns, such as the high pressure it can place on students; the lack of social contact with peers; stigmatisation from being taken from mainstream settings; and the expense involved.
2. *Teaching in a small group* – this was seen as providing a focused, relaxed and supportive atmosphere. However there were negative impacts, in that some students suffer from being removed from their class and may feel stigmatised; they miss what is being taught in the main class; and group teaching is possibly not sufficiently individualised. Specialist teachers reported a lack of time to plan lessons in conjunction with class teacher, and, at the secondary level, they often felt they did have not enough curriculum knowledge.

3. *Co-operative teaching with two teachers in the class* – this was generally welcomed by both partners. It means that more members of a class are able to access support, and, crucially, students remain in the classroom so that they do not miss out on the content of the lessons. It was also felt that lessons were better designed. However, this needs time for joint planning and if this is not available the support teachers can feel more like an assistant.

**Teaching assistants.** In some countries, support for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools is coordinated by a specialist member of staff, sometimes known as the special educational needs co-ordinator or, increasingly, as an inclusion manager. Their work may involve them in coordinating support for individual students, sometimes using teams of teaching assistants who work with individual students in the classroom.

Some research shows that teachers feel that the presence of assistants in class has a wide ranging effect on the teaching and learning in the class including: increased attention amongst students, improvements in learning, improved teacher effectiveness and improved outcomes (Farrell et al 2010). However, other studies suggest a mixed picture regarding the impact of such staff. For example, as a result of their large scale study, Blatchford et al (2009) argue that there is little evidence of impact on educational outcomes. On the other hand, there is some evidence that suggests that targeted support interventions, with small groups in primary schools where the support staff were appropriately trained, had some success in increasing literacy outcomes with identified students (Farrell et al 2010).

Meanwhile, Webster et al (2010) identified a negative correlation in secondary schools between the amount of contact students with special educational needs had with teaching assistants and the interactions they had with their teachers. In addition, the majority of supported students spent most of their time working on tasks different to those of their peers. This led the authors to conclude that too often, in the English context, teacher assistant support was used as an alternative to attention from teachers. This being the case, they recommended that:

- Schools should examine the deployment of support staff to ensure they do not routinely support lower attaining students
- Students with most need should get more, not less, time with teachers
- Teachers must take lesson planning responsibility for all students in their classes, including those supported by support staff.

While there were some differences in the findings of these studies (possibly due to context), there is general agreement that if teaching assistants are to be used within mainstream education they must be provided with relevant training. It is also argued that teachers themselves need training in how to make use of such support within their classrooms.

**Proposition 3:** The use of additional support for individuals needs to be carefully planned and those involved require appropriate training

## SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

**The features of inclusive schools.** There is a body of literature highlighting the challenges that emerge when schools take action to become more inclusive (e.g. Ainscow & West, 2006; Dyson & Millward, 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). This literature points to the internal complexities of schools as organisations, and the constraints and contradictions that are generated by the policy environments in which they exist. As such, they usefully problematise the assumptions underlying the more mechanistic approaches to improvement, but stop short of saying how inclusion might actually be developed.

Reflecting on his extensive experiences of studying schools described as being inclusive, Dyson (2010) argues that there is not one single model of what an inclusive school looks like. He has found, for example, that 'inclusive' schools vary in terms of their student populations. Some educate concentrations of children with particular disabilities in the context of school populations that otherwise experience few difficulties. Others educate a high proportion of children who are achieving at very low levels, in the context of populations that are themselves low-achieving and facing multiple difficulties. Other schools show a mixture of these population characteristics.

Dyson also notes that schools organise their provision in very different ways. Some place children with special educational needs in 'units' or 'resource bases', so that they spend significant periods of time away from their peers. Others place them in mainstream classrooms, perhaps with additional adult support. Most commonly, schools establish flexible provision, so that children identified as having special educational needs spend their time in different learning environments, sometimes alongside their mainstream peers, and sometimes in semi-segregated settings.

Classroom practices in highly inclusive schools tend to show considerable flexibility in terms of individual planning, individual support, a variety of activities, and a mixture of individual, group and whole-class work. However, these are features that could probably be found in well-organised classrooms everywhere. Again, there is no indication that there is a distinctive pedagogy that is peculiar to highly-inclusive schools.

The heads and teachers of inclusive schools Dyson has interviewed are, he suggests, typically values-driven. However, their commitment is not so much to inclusion per se, as to the principle of 'doing the best they can' for all of their students. 'Doing the best' in this sense does not necessarily carry with it any commitment to educate students in particular settings, and is entirely compatible with the kind of mixed, flexible provision just described. Moreover, this commitment does not prevent them reporting significant practical difficulties in educating a wide range of students in the same school and (where this occurs) in the same classroom. Students with 'behaviour difficulties', in particular, are often seen as being difficult to include in mainstream schools and classrooms, and even the most committed teachers have found these challenges hard to meet.

Dyson goes on to suggest that highly-inclusive schools are certainly welcoming and supportive institutions for children who experience difficulties. However, this does not prevent them from also being committed to driving up the achievements of all of their students. Indeed, they tend to have a range of strategies for raising achievement that are typical of those employed by all schools, and the

presence of students identified as having special educational needs does not appear to inhibit these strategies.

**Fostering inclusive school development.** Where writers have addressed the question of how schools can become more inclusive, they tend to give particular emphasis on processes of collaboration, review and development. For example, Skrtic (1991) stresses the importance of staff within a school pooling their different professional expertise. In such a context, children who cannot easily be educated within the school's established routines need not be seen as 'having' problems, but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible. Similarly, Ainscow (1999) points to certain 'organisational conditions' - distributed leadership, high levels of staff and student involvement, joint planning, a commitment to enquiry and so on - that promote collaboration and problem-solving amongst staff, and which, therefore, produce more inclusive responses to diversity.

These themes are supported by a review of international literature that examines the effectiveness of school actions in promoting inclusion (Dyson, et al, 2002). The review concludes that there is a limited, but by no means negligible, body of empirical evidence about the relationship between school action and the participation of all students in the cultures, curricula and communities of their schools. In summary, it suggests that:

- Some schools are characterised by an 'inclusive culture'. Within such schools, there is some degree of consensus amongst adults around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities. This consensus may not be total and may not necessarily remove all tensions or contradictions in practice. On the other hand, there is likely to be a high level of staff collaboration and joint problem-solving, and similar values and commitments may extend into the student body, and into parent and other community stakeholders in the school.
- The extent to which such 'inclusive cultures' lead directly and unproblematically to enhanced student participation is not clear. Some aspects of these cultures, however, can be seen as participatory by definition. For instance, respect for diversity from teachers may itself be understood as a form of participation by children within a school community. Moreover, schools characterised by such cultures are also likely to be characterised by forms of organisation (such as specialist provision being made in the ordinary classroom, rather than by withdrawal) and practice (such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learning) which could be regarded as participatory by definition.
- Schools with 'inclusive cultures' are also likely to be characterised by the presence of leaders who are committed to inclusive values and to a leadership style which encourages a range of individuals to participate in leadership functions. Such schools are also likely to have good links with parents and with their communities.

On the basis of this evidence, the review team make a number of recommendations for policy and practice. They suggest that attempts to develop inclusive schools should pay attention to the development of 'inclusive cultures' and, particularly, to the building of some degree of consensus

around inclusive values within school communities. This leads them to argue that principals and other school leaders should be selected and trained in the light of their commitment to inclusive values and their capacity to lead in a participatory manner. Finally, they conclude that the external policy environment should be compatible with inclusive developments if it is to support rather than to undermine schools' efforts.

According to the review, there are general principles of school organisation and classroom practice which should be followed: notably, the removal of structural barriers between different groups of students and staff, the dismantling of separate programmes, services and specialisms, and the development of pedagogical approaches (such as constructivist and cooperative learning approaches of the sort we have referred to) which enable students to learn together rather than separately. It is also argued that schools should build close relations with parents and communities based on developing a shared commitment to inclusive values.

The implications for practice of such an orientation are illustrated in the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow 2002), a school self-review instrument. Used in many countries throughout the world, including Spain, the Index enables schools to draw on the knowledge and views of staff, students and parents/carers about barriers to learning and participation that exist within the existing 'cultures, policies and practices' of schools in order to identify priorities for change. In connecting inclusion with the detail of policy and practice, the Index encourages those who use it to build up their own view of inclusion, related to their experience and values, as they work out what policies and practices they wish to promote or discourage. The Index can support staff in schools in refining their planning processes, so that these involve wider collaboration and participation, and introduce coherence to development.

Such approaches are congruent with the view that inclusion is essentially about attempts to embody particular values in particular contexts (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). Unlike mechanistic views of school improvement, they acknowledge that decisions about how to improve schools always involve moral and political reasoning, as well as technical considerations. Moreover, they offer specific processes through which inclusive developments might be promoted. Discussions of inclusion and exclusion can help, therefore, to make explicit the values which underlie what, how and why changes should be made in schools. Inclusive cultures, underpinned by particular organisational conditions, may make those discussions more likely to occur and more productive when they do occur.

**Proposition 4:** Inclusive schools can take many forms but what is common is the existence of an organisational culture that views student diversity positively

## LEADERSHIP FOR INCLUSION

**Moving thinking forward.** It seems, then, that the developments of inclusive practices are likely to require challenges to the thinking of those within schools and, inevitably, this raises

questions regarding leadership. A recent literature review concludes that learner diversity and inclusion are increasingly seen as key challenges for educational leaders (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). So, for example, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) suggest that with continuing diversity, schools will need to thrive on uncertainty, have a greater capacity for collective problem-solving, and be able to respond to a wider range of learners. Sergiovanni (1992) also points to the challenge of student diversity and argues that current approaches to school leadership may well be getting in the way of improvement efforts.

Leadership has been found to be a significant factor in successfully implementing the participation of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools (Ainscow 1999; Chadbourne 1997; Leo and Barton 2006; Lipsky and Gartner 1997, 1998). Zollers et al. (1999) examined 1,000 schools in the USA and found seven common elements in schools with successful inclusive practices. These elements were: visionary leadership, collaboration, refocused use of assessment, support for staff and students, funding, effective parental involvement, and curricular adaptation and effective instructional practices. Similarly, Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) identified features shared by principals in three countries (Portugal, the UK and USA) who were successful in fostering inclusive ways of working: an uncompromising commitment to inclusive education; clearly defined roles, responsibilities and boundaries; collaborative interpersonal style; problem solving and conflict resolution skills; understanding and appreciation of expertise of others; and supportive relationships amongst staff.

**The tasks of leadership.** All of this raises questions regarding about how leaders carry out their work in respect to the fostering of inclusion. Lambert and her colleagues (1995) argue for what they see as a constructivist view of leadership. This is defined as the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct common meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling. They use this perspective to argue that leadership involves an interactive process entered into by both learners and teachers. Consequently, there is a need for shared leadership, with the principal seen as a leader of leaders. Hierarchical structures have to be replaced by shared responsibility in a community that becomes characterised by agreed values and hopes, such that many of the control functions associated with school leadership become less important or even counter-productive.

Relevant to this way of thinking, much of the literature on the role of leadership in relation to overall school improvement places emphasis on the importance of social relationships (Hopkins 2001). Johnson and Johnson (1989), two key figures in the field of social psychology, argue that leaders may structure staff working relationships in one of three ways: competitively, individualistically, or cooperatively. Within a competitive structure, teachers work against each other to achieve a goal that only a few can attain; an individualistic structure exists when teachers work alone to accomplish goals that are unrelated to the goals of their colleagues; whereas, a cooperative structure exists when teachers coordinate their efforts to achieve joint goals. They go on to argue that to maximise the productivity of a school, principals have to: challenge the status quo of traditional competitive and individualistic approaches to teaching; inspire a clear mutual vision of what the school should and could be; empower staff through cooperative team work; lead by example, using cooperative procedures and taking risks; and encourage staff members to persist and keep striving to improve

their expertise. Within this overall formulation, the authors place a strong emphasis on the need to build cooperative teams.

The most helpful theoretical and empirical leads regarding leadership for inclusion, however, are provided by Riehl (2000), who, following an extensive review of research literature on leadership for inclusion, develops ‘a comprehensive approach to school administration and diversity’. She concludes that school leaders need to attend to three broad types of task: fostering new meanings about diversity; promoting inclusive practices within schools; and building connections between schools and communities. She goes on to consider how these tasks can be accomplished, exploring how the concept of practice, especially discursive practice, can contribute to a fuller understanding of the work of school principals. This analysis leads the author to offer a positive view of the potential for school principals to engage in inclusive, transformative developments. She concludes: ‘When wedded to a relentless commitment to equity, voice, and social justice, administrators’ efforts in the tasks of sense-making, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school may indeed foster a new form of practice’ (p. 71)

**Proposition 5:** Leaders have a central role in working with their colleagues to foster an inclusive culture within their schools

## DRAWING OUT THE LESSONS

The international research I have summarised in this paper suggests that the development of more inclusive forms of education is less about the introduction of particular techniques or organisational arrangements, and much more about processes of social learning within particular contexts. The use of evidence as a means of stimulating experimentation and collaboration within a school is seen as a central strategy. As Copland (2003) suggests, inquiry can be the ‘engine’ to enable the distribution of leadership that is needed in order to foster participation in learning, and the ‘glue’ that can bind a community together around a common purpose.

As I have argued, all of this has major implications for leadership practice within schools. In particular, it calls for efforts to encourage coordinated and sustained efforts around the idea that changing outcomes for vulnerable groups of students is unlikely to be achieved unless there are changes in the behaviours of adults. Consequently, the starting point must be with staff members: in effect, enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increasing their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling taken for granted assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours.

Such an argument is based on the assumption that schools already have much of the expertise that is needed to support the learning of all of their students, including those with disabilities and special educational needs. If this is true, the logical starting point for inclusive development within a school is through a detailed analysis of existing practice and with the sharing of expertise amongst staff members.

With this overall argument in mind, I have suggested five *propositions* that can be used to develop more inclusive ways of working:

1. Inclusive classroom practices involve mobilising available human resources in order to overcome barriers to participation and learning
2. An engagement with various kinds of evidence can be a powerful driver for encouraging teachers to develop more inclusive practices
3. The use of additional support for individual students needs to be carefully planned and those involved require appropriate training
4. Inclusive schools can take many forms but what is common is the existence of an organisational culture that views student diversity positively.
5. Leaders have a central role in working with their colleagues to foster an inclusive culture within their schools.

These ideas reinforce the idea that developing more inclusive schools is essentially a social process that has to occur within particular contexts. In this sense, it is about learning how to live with difference and, indeed, learning how to learn from difference. Consequently, the most important factor is the collective will to make it happen.

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