From exclusion to inclusion:
ways of responding in schools to students
with special educational needs

Mel Ainscow, Alan Dyson and Saira Weiner
Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester

School improvement: international reviews of best practice

Working with partners including the Department of Education at Oxford University, the Centre for Equity in Education at the University of Manchester, the University of Glasgow, the University of Nottingham and the Hong Kong Institute of Education, CfBT Education Trust has commissioned a series of reviews of international literature. These reviews cover a range of topics related to school improvement including assessment for learning; the inclusion of students with special educational needs; effective teaching practice; school self-evaluation; and successful school leadership.

The idea that schools can impact positively on student outcomes is a crucial driver in the rise of interest in school improvement research and practice. These reviews highlight international examples of best practice in order to effect change and identify how effective school improvement manifests itself. It forms a useful tool for schools and school leaders, but also acts as a lesson for policymakers in terms of what works around the world.

This review focuses on: **From exclusion to inclusion**
With a specific focus on children with special educational needs (SEN), this review addresses the forms of classroom practice that can help all children to participate. The review particularly focuses on elements of inclusive education and the implications for schools and school leaders.

The other four reviews in this series focus on:

Assessment for learning
Assessment for learning – where the first priority is to promote learning – is a key means of initiating improvement. The features, strategies and principles underpinning assessment for learning form the basis of this review.

Effective teaching
Teachers are one of the key elements in any school and effective teaching is one of the key propellers for school improvement. This review is concerned with how to define a teacher's effectiveness and what makes an effective teacher. It draws out implications for policymakers in education and for improving classroom practice.

School self-evaluation for school improvement
School self-evaluation can be a fundamental force in achieving school improvement. This review establishes what the key debates are in relation to school self-evaluation, what principles and processes are associated with it, and what the implications are for school self-evaluation as a means of leading school improvement. The review incorporates a framework for conducting self-evaluation and case study examples from systems and schools that have previously undergone the process.

Successful leadership
School leaders are under considerable pressure to demonstrate the contribution of their work to school improvement, which has resulted in the creation of a wide range of literature which addresses leadership in the context of school improvement. This review pays particular attention to issues including transformational leadership, instructional/pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership.

CfBT is a world authority on school improvement. We work directly with schools and governments improving education outcomes through evaluation, training and professional development programmes. This series of reviews fits into our aim to develop evidence for education and supports our goal to provide school improvement programmes which are evidence based.

Contents

Executive summary

This paper reviews the international literature on the development of effective ways of including children and young people with special educational needs in schools. It addresses three overall questions:

- What forms of classroom practice can help all children to participate and learn?
- How can such practices be developed?
- What does this mean for school organisation and leadership?

The analysis of the literature suggests six key ideas:

- Schools need to understand clearly what is meant by inclusive education.
- Inclusive classroom practices involve overcoming barriers to student participation and learning.
- Engaging with various kinds of evidence can encourage teachers to develop more inclusive practices.
- Additional support for individual students should be carefully planned; those involved require appropriate training.
- Inclusive schools can take many forms, but they all have an organisational culture that views student diversity positively.
- Leaders have a central role in working with their colleagues to foster an inclusive culture within their schools.

The literature suggests that supporting students with special educational needs, and other groups of vulnerable learners, depends less on the introduction of particular techniques or organisational arrangements, and much more on processes of social learning within particular contexts. The use of evidence as a means of stimulating experimentation and collaboration within a school is a central strategy.

Because 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, inclusive development should start with a detailed analysis of existing practice and with the sharing of expertise amongst staff members.

There is also a need to focus on the attitudes and beliefs of staff members: to enlarge their capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increase their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling established assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours.

There are major implications for leadership practice within schools. In particular, senior leaders have to be skilful in championing the idea that better outcomes for vulnerable groups of students require changes in the behaviour of adults. Central to this is a need to foster an inclusive culture within schools; one that welcomes and respects differences among the student population.

Introduction

In this review of literature we provide a summary of recent international thinking regarding ways of responding to children and young people defined as having special educational needs. In so doing, we take account of the complexities and uncertainties surrounding current policy and practice. In particular:

- Population changes – developments in medical science have led to significant changes in the nature of the population of learners defined as having special educational needs. In particular, there has been an increase in students with more severe and complex impairments, and those with various forms of autism.

- Problems of definition – making sense of these changing populations is made even more complex by the uncertainties that exist regarding how needs should be defined. This means that a child defined as having special educational needs in one school or district might not be categorised as such in another context.

- The emphasis on inclusion – further complexity is then added by the increasing emphasis that has been placed on inclusive education. Once again there is considerable variation across the world with respect to how this concept is interpreted and to the extent it has informed local policies. The recent trend in some counties towards the co-location of special schools within mainstream school contexts is yet further evidence of a field that is in transition.

- Difficulties in determining progress – given all this complexity, it is hardly surprising that there is considerable debate within the field about how best to measure the progress of learners with special educational needs. For some groups – such as those with physical or sensory impairments, or those experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties – the usual test and examination measures are often appropriate, although there remain problems regarding how best to compare the progress of cohorts in different schools. Measuring the progress of youngsters with more severe learning difficulties presents particular challenges.

In carrying out the review, we have taken the view that responding to children with special educational needs should be seen as part of a wider set of issues relating to the education of all children who experience difficulties in school and, ultimately, of all children. In taking this position we believe that the distinction between 'special educational needs' and 'non-special educational needs' children is now rapidly becoming outmoded, in that it overlooks the considerable developments that have occurred in the ability of education systems to identify and respond to a wider range of difficulties.

A further complication relates to the contributions of Special Schools. Increasingly, efforts are focused on finding ways of using their expertise and resources in ways that will add support to the changes taking place in mainstream schools.[1] Such moves open up new opportunities for special school staff to continue their historical task of providing support for the most vulnerable learners.

Bearing this complexity in mind, in what follows we identify a series of key ideas that have emerged from our analysis of relevant literature. Together, these ideas suggest what needs to be done in order to develop schools that can effectively support the participation and learning of all children, including those who experience various forms of difficulty. More specifically, we address the following strategic questions:

- What forms of classroom practice can help all children to participate and learn?
- How can such practices be developed?
- What does this mean for school organisation and leadership?

Before focusing on these questions directly, we summarise the debates about students with special educational needs and the forms of schooling that should be provided for them.

---

[1] See various chapters in Cigman (2006).

From exclusion to inclusion

Patterns of development

Across the world there is evidence of patterns of development in the ways in which school systems have responded to children experiencing difficulties.[2] In broad terms, this has involved a step-by-step movement from exclusion to special education provision, through to an emphasis on integration and, finally, to the idea of inclusive education. Naturally, the pace of development through these stages has varied from country to country.

In the 19th century, special educators in many European countries argued for and helped develop provision for children and young people who were excluded from educational provision.[3] Usually this led to the establishment of Special Schools, run by voluntary organisations and separate from the schools attended by the majority of children. Only much later did this provision become adopted by national governments. For example, in the United Kingdom it was only in 1970 that those learners categorised as 'having severe learning difficulties' (previously referred to as mentally handicapped), were deemed to be even worthy of education.

Similarly, provision for children experiencing difficulties within mainstream schools grew in the second half of the 20th century as a result of a gradual recognition that some students were poorly served within and, in some instances excluded from, existing arrangements for providing education. As this provision developed, there was also increased emphasis on integration, as special educators explored ways of supporting previously segregated groups so that they could find places in local community schools.[4]

It can be argued, therefore, that the recent emphasis on inclusive education is but a further step along this historical road. It is, however, a major step, in that the aim is to transform the mainstream in ways that will increase its capacity for responding to all learners. This requires the participation of many stakeholders in ways that challenge much of the status quo and has significant implications for the future roles of those working in special provision and support services.

Inclusive education

In some countries, inclusive education is still largely thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings.[5] However, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that responds to diversity among all learners.[6] The argument developed in this paper adopts this broader formulation. It presumes that the aim of inclusive school improvement is to eliminate exclusionary processes from education that are a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and attainment, as well as to disabilities. It starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society.[7]

This approach was endorsed by the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education.[8] The most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education, the Salamanca Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are 'the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all'. Furthermore, it suggests that such schools can 'provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.'

[2] Ainscow (1999); Mittler (2000).
[3] Reynolds & Ainscow (1994).
[4] Pijl & Meijor (1991).
[5] Mittler (2005).
[6] UNESCO (2001).
[7] Vitello & Mithaug (1998).
[8] UNESCO (1994).

This radical approach to special needs suggests that progress will be much more likely if it is recognised that difficulties experienced by students result from the ways in which schools are currently organised, the nature of the curriculum and the forms of teaching that are provided.[9] Consequently, schools have to be reformed and pedagogy has to be improved in ways that will lead them to respond positively to learner diversity – seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for enriching learning.[10] Within such a conceptualisation, a consideration of difficulties experienced by students provides an agenda for reform and insights into how such reforms might be brought about.

However, research suggests that this new approach is only going to be successful in contexts where there is a culture of collaboration that encourages and supports problem-solving.[11] This means that the development of inclusive practices requires those within a particular context to work together to address barriers to education experienced by some learners. This, in turn, points to the importance of forms of leadership that will help to foster such ways of working and national policies that will encourage such practices.

National development

The last twenty years have seen considerable efforts in many countries to develop more inclusive forms of schooling. The United Nations' strategy of 'Education for All' encouraged such initiatives, focusing specifically on the need to reach out to excluded and marginalised groups of learners, not least those with disabilities. Further impetus was encouraged by the Salamanca Statement, which provides a framework for thinking about how to move policy and practice forward, based on the following principles:

- Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
- Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs.
- Education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs.
- Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.

Salamanca encourages us to look at educational difficulties in a new way. This is based on the belief that changes in methodology and organisation made in response to students experiencing difficulties can, under certain conditions, benefit all children. Since the late 1980s a growing number of scholars in different countries have taken this new thinking forward.[12] They argue that progress towards more inclusive education systems requires a move away from practices based on the traditional perspectives of Special Education, towards approaches that focus on developing 'effective schools for all'.[13]

This formulation has been defined as an 'organisational paradigm' of inclusive education.[14] It requires new thinking that challenges assumptions that are deeply established among many educators across the world. Specifically, it requires a move away from explanations of educational failure that concentrate on the characteristics of individual children and their families, towards an analysis of the barriers to participation and learning experienced by students within education systems.[15] Here, the notion of barriers draws our attention to the ways in which the lack of resources or expertise, inappropriate curricula or teaching methods, and attitudes can limit the presence, participation and achievement of some learners.

---

[9] Skrtic (1991).
[10] Miles & Ainscow (2011).
[11] Ainscow (1999); Carrington (1999); Kugelmass (2001); Skrtic (1991).
[12] For example Ballard (1997); Booth (1995); Kugelmass (2001); Mittler (2000); Skrtic (1991); Slee (1996).
[13] Ainscow (1991).
[14] Dyson & Millward (2000).
[15] Booth & Ainscow (2011).

Given the confusion and uncertainties that exist, advancing towards the implementation of inclusive education is far from easy. Evidence of progress varies considerably across the world. Moreover, it must not be assumed that there is full acceptance of the inclusive philosophy. Some in the field remain resistant to the idea of children with special needs being educated in mainstream schools.[16] In some contexts, too, disability-focused organisations argue for separate, 'specialist' services.[17] For example, some organisations of deaf people argue that children with hearing impairments have to be educated separately in order to guarantee their right to education in the medium of sign language and access to deaf culture. There are those who believe that small units located in the standard school environment can provide the specialist knowledge, equipment and support for which the mainstream classroom and teacher can never provide a full substitute.[18]

Clarity of purpose

Given these disputes, we argue that progress requires a greater clarity about what becoming more inclusive involves. For us, it requires a 'principled approach to education',[19] which involves:

- the process of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the curricula, cultures and communities of local schools
- restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality
- the presence, participation and achievement of all students vulnerable to exclusionary pressures, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as 'having special educational needs'.

Certain features of this way of conceptualising inclusive education are of particular importance: inclusion is concerned with all children and young people in schools; it is focused on presence, participation and achievement; inclusion and exclusion are linked together, such that inclusion involves the active combating of exclusion; and inclusion is seen as a never-ending process. Thus an inclusive school is one that is on the move, rather than one that has reached a perfect state. Inclusion is, therefore, a process requiring ongoing vigilance.[20]

> **Key idea:** In order to move policy and practice forward, schools must understand clearly what is meant by inclusive education.

[16] Brantlinger (1997).
[17] Freire & César (2003).
[18] For example Fuchs & Fuchs (1994).
[19] Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (2006).
[20] Ainscow & Miles (2008).

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.[21] 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.[22] Put simply, effective teaching is effective teaching for all students. Indeed, it has been suggested that what are seen as specialised pedagogies further marginalise and exclude children with difficulties.[23] However, while agreeing with this assertion, Davis and Florian conclude that this does not diminish the need for specialist expertise, a theme which we 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.[24] This may help to explain why integration efforts that are dependent upon importing practices from special education tend to foster the development of new, yet more subtle forms of segregation, albeit within 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 help students categorised as having special needs.[25] 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 European contexts has encouraged some school leaders to feel that many children need additional support, thus creating budget problems within education systems.[26] 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.[27] In this way, special education can be a means of hiding discrimination against some groups of students behind an apparently benign label, thus justifying their low attainment 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.[28] 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[29] 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.

[21] Ainscow (1998); Florian & Black-Hawkins (2010); Slee (1996).
[22] Davis and Florian (2004); Lewis and Norwich (2005); Florian and Black-Hawkins (2010).
[23] Lewis and Norwich (2005).
[24] Ainscow (1997).
[25] Balshaw (1999).
[26] Ainscow, Farrell & Tweddle (2000); Fulcher (1989).
[27] Trent, Artiles & Englert (1998).
[28] Ainscow (1999).
[29] Bartolome (1994).

So, for example, a recent study by Florian and Black-Hawkins[30] 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 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[31] 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[32] 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.[33] 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 his or her 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.[34]

Responding to diversity

Observations of planning processes used by teachers who seem to be effective in responding to diversity suggest certain patterns.[35] 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 ongoing process of designing and redesigning established patterns.

[30] Florian and Black-Hawkins (2010).
[31] Stigler and Hiebert (1999).
[32] Hargreaves (2003).
[33] Lewis & Norwich (2005); Udvari-Solnar (1996).
[34] Black & Wiliam (1998).
[35] Ainscow (1997, 1999, 2005); Hopkins, Ainscow & West (1994).

Much of this planning, therefore, 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[36] or tinkering.[37]

Hart[38] 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'.[39] 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 maximise participation, while at the same time achieving high standards of learning for all members of a class.[40] 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, presents 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.[41] 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, while 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 discussions that are encouraged by such seating arrangements.

[36] Ainscow (1999).
[37] Huberman (1993).
[38] Hart (1996).
[39] Hart (1996: 8).
[40] For example Johnson & Johnson (1999); Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1998).
[41] Alexander (2010).

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.[42] 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 fact the larger the class, the more the 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.

Key idea: Inclusive classroom practices involve mobilising available human resources in order to overcome barriers to participation and learning.

[42] Hawes (1988).

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.[43] 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' students. 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 leaves little scope for teachers who reject the fixed view of measurable ability to hold on to their principles.

By 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 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.

The researchers explain that the teachers in their study based their practices on a strong conviction that things can change and be changed for the better, recognising 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 mindset, 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.[44] Importantly, this process took place in the context of the 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.[45]

---

[43] Hart (2003); Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre (2004).
[44] Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2004); Ainscow et al. (2003); Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006).
[45] Wilkinson & Pickett (2000).

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[46] 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.[47] 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.[48]

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.[49] Without such a language teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities. As we 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 practice. 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.[50] 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.

[46] Wenger (1998).
[47] Elmore, Peterson & McCarthy (1996).
[48] Lipman (1997).
[49] Huberman (1993).
[50] Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler (2002).

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.[51] 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 lessons are called 'study lessons' and 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.

Lesson study can be conducted in many ways. It may, for example, involve a small sub-group of volunteer staff, or be carried out through departmental or special interest groupings. It can also happen across schools, and is then part of a wider, managed network of teachers working together.[52] The collection of evidence is a key factor in the lesson study approach. This usually involves observation of student responses and the use of video recording. Emphasis is also placed on listening to the views of students in a way that tends to introduce a critical edge to the discussions that take place.

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.[53] 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,[54] and evidence collected from students about teaching and learning arrangements within a school.[55] 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 our argument is informed by the work of Robinson,[56] 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.[57]

However, such enquiry-based approaches to the development of inclusive practices are far from straightforward. 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.[58]

---

[51] Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler (2002); Lo, Yan & Pakey (2005); Stigler & Hiebert (1999).
[52] Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (2006).
[53] Ainscow, Howes, Farrell & Frankham (2003).
[54] Ainscow (1999).
[55] Kaplan (2006); Messiou (2006); Miles & Kaplan (2005).
[56] Robinson (1998).
[57] Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (2006); Hart (1996).
[58] Howes & Ainscow (2006); Ainscow & Kaplan (2006).

This reminds us 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 socio-economic status, race, language or 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'.[59] 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[60] 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, 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.[61]

Hargreaves[62] argues that, within school, 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.[63] 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 form 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.[64]

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.[65] 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.

> **Key idea:** An engagement with various kinds of evidence can be a powerful driver for encouraging teachers to develop more inclusive practices.

[59] Trent et al. (1998).
[60] Schein (1985).
[61] Kugelmass (2001); Rosenholtz (1989).
[62] Hargreaves (1995).
[63] Fullan (1991).
[64] Ainscow (1999).
[65] Dyson (2006).

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.[66] 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.,[67] notes the use of three approaches:

1. *One to one individual teaching with a special education teacher* – while 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 the class teacher, and, at the secondary level, they often felt they did have not enough curriculum knowledge.

3. *Cooperative 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 teacher can feel more like an assistant.

Teaching assistants

In some countries, support for students with SEN in mainstream schools is coordinated by a specialist member of staff, sometimes known as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or, increasingly, as the 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. Between 1997 and 2008 the number of teaching assistants in England increased from 60,600 to 176,900, which represents a quarter of the school workforce.[68]

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.[69] 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.[70] argue that there is little evidence of impact on educational outcomes. On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that targeted support interventions, with small groups in primary schools where the support staff were appropriately trained, have some success in increasing literacy outcomes with identified students.[71]

[66] Ainscow (1999).
[67] Takala et al. (2009).
[68] DCSF (2008).
[69] Farrell et al. (2010).
[70] Blatchford et al. (2009).
[71] Farrell et al. (2010).

Meanwhile, Webster et al.[72] identified a negative correlation in secondary schools between the amount of contact that SEN students 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 from 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.

> **Key idea:** The use of additional support for individuals needs to be carefully planned and those involved require appropriate training.

---

[72] Webster et al. (2010).

School development

Challenging poor outcomes

Charged with the task of exploring ways of improving parental confidence in the special educational needs system, a recent national inquiry conducted in the United Kingdom concluded that 'educational achievement for children with special educational needs is too low and the gap with their peers too wide'.[73] The reasons given for this were the long-term effects of the overall educational system and a society which places insufficient value on achieving good outcomes for disabled children and others with special educational needs.

The report goes on to argue that there is a need to change the current culture of low expectations for children with special educational needs. The report suggests that the culture and organisation of too many schools is still to focus the best teachers on those children with the highest abilities. It recommends that the best teachers and better-targeted resources need to be more focused on those most in need.

In considering these issues it is necessary to address potential tensions between efforts to foster inclusion and the demand to raise standards in schools. In most countries, schools are primarily judged in terms of the academic attainment of their students. In this policy context, schools tend to prioritise policies towards making themselves more effective and competitive, an approach that can de-prioritise and discourage effective responses to pupil diversity.[74] It has also been argued that some schools are concerned that becoming more inclusive might affect how they are viewed externally.[75]

In examining the impact of these pressures, some researchers have cast doubt as to whether it is possible to have high standards when significant numbers of students with special educational needs are included in a school.[76] However, it is worth noting that a large-scale statistical analysis in England, carried out by Dyson et al.,[77] found very little impact of the presence of such children on overall school outcomes.

The features of inclusive schools

There is a body of literature highlighting the challenges that emerge when schools take action to become more inclusive.[78] 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 question 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[79] argues that there is no 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.

---

[73] The Lamb Inquiry (2009).
[74] Ainscow et al. (2004).
[75] Dyson and Millward (2000).
[76] Lunt and Norwich (1999); Audit Commission (2002).
[77] Dyson et al. (2002).
[78] For example Ainscow & West (2006); Dyson & Millward (2000); Thomas & Loxley (2001).
[79] Dyson (2010).

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 headteachers and teachers of inclusive schools Dyson has interviewed[80] are 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 we have 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 place particular emphasis on processes of collaboration, review and development. For example, Skrtic[81] emphasises 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 presenting a challenge to teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible. Similarly, Ainscow[82] 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.

[80] Dyson (2010).
[81] Skrtic (1991).
[82] Ainscow (1999).

These themes are supported by a review of international literature that examines the effectiveness of school actions in promoting inclusion.[83] 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 the following:

- Some schools are characterised by an 'inclusive culture'. Within such schools, there is some degree of consensus among adults about 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.

- The local and national policy environment can act to support or to undermine the realisation of schools' inclusive values.

On the basis of this evidence, the Dyson 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.

---

[83] Dyson et al. (2002).

The implications for practice of such an orientation are illustrated in the *Index for Inclusion*,[84] a school self-review instrument. Used in many countries throughout the world, the Index enables schools to draw on the knowledge and views of staff, students, parents/carers, and governors 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.[85]

Such approaches are congruent with the view that inclusion is essentially about attempts to embody particular values in particular contexts.[86] 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.

> **Key idea:** Inclusive schools can take many forms but what is common is the existence of an organisational culture that views student diversity positively.

---

[84] Booth and Ainscow (2011).
[85] See Rustemier & Booth (2005).
[86] Ainscow, Booth & Dyson (2006).

Leadership for inclusion

Moving thinking forward

It seems, then, that the development of inclusive practices is 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.[87] For example, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach[88] 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[89] 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.[90] Zollers et al.[91] 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, curricular adaptation and effective instructional practices. Chadbourne,[92] too, found that the role of the principal was critical in the implementation of an inclusive programme. Similarly, Kugelmass and Ainscow[93] 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 among staff.

The tasks of leadership

All of this raises questions about how leaders carry out their work with respect to fostering inclusion. Lambert and her colleagues[94] 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.

[87] West, Ainscow & Notman (2003).
[88] Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999).
[89] Sergiovanni (1992).
[90] Ainscow (1999); Chadbourne (1997); Leo and Barton (2006); Lipsky and Gartner (1997, 1998).
[91] Zollers et al. (1999).
[92] Chadbourne (1997).
[93] Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004).
[94] Lambert et al. (1995).

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.[95] Johnson and Johnson,[96] 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,[97] 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).

Key idea: Leaders have a central role in working with their colleagues to foster an inclusive culture within their schools.

[95] Hopkins (2001).
[96] Johnson and Johnson (1989).
[97] Riehl (2000).

Drawing out the lessons

The literature we have summarised suggests that supporting students with special educational needs – and, indeed, other groups of vulnerable learners – 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[98] 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 we 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, this review recommends six *key ideas*:

1. In order to move policy and practice forward within schools, there needs to be clarity regarding what is meant by inclusive education.
2. Inclusive classroom practices involve mobilising available human resources in order to overcome barriers to participation and learning.
3. An engagement with various kinds of evidence can be a powerful driver for encouraging teachers to develop more inclusive practices.
4. The use of additional support for individual students needs to be carefully planned and those involved require appropriate training.
5. Inclusive schools can take many forms but what is common is the existence of an organisational culture that views student diversity positively.
6. 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 take place within particular contexts. In this sense, inclusive school improvement 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.

---

[98] Copland (2003).

References and further reading

Ainscow, M. (ed.) (1991) *Effective schools for all*. London: Fulton.

Ainscow, M. (1997) 'Towards inclusive schooling'. *British journal of special education*, 24 (1), 3-6.

Ainscow, M. (1998) 'Developing links between special needs and school improvement'. *Support for learning*, 13(2), 70-75.

Ainscow, M. (1999) *Understanding the development of inclusive schools*. London: Falmer.

Ainscow, M. (2005) 'Developing inclusive education systems: what are the levers for change?' *Journal of educational change*, 6, 109-124.

Ainscow, M. (2006) 'Towards a more inclusive education system: where next for special schools?'
In R. Cigman (ed.), *Included or excluded? The challenge of the mainstream for some SEN children*. London: Routledge.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T. and Dyson, A. (2004) 'Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: a collaborative action research network'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 8 (2), 125-140.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., and Dyson, A., with Farrell, P., Frankham, J., Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and Smith, R. (2006) *Improving schools, developing inclusion*. London: Routledge.

Ainscow, M., Farrell, P. and Tweddle, D. (2000) 'Developing policies for inclusive education: a study of the role of local education authorities'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 4(3), 211-229.

Ainscow, M., Howes, A.J., Farrell, P. and Frankham, J. (2003) 'Making sense of the development of inclusive practices'. *European journal of special needs education*, 18 (2), 227-242.

Ainscow, M. and Kaplan, I. (2006) 'Using evidence to encourage inclusive school development: possibilities and challenges'. *Australasian journal of special education*, 29 (2), 106-116.

Ainscow, M. and Miles, S. (2008) 'Making Education for All inclusive: where next?' *Prospects*, 37(1), 15-34.

Ainscow, M. & West, M. (eds) (2006) *Improving urban schools: leadership and collaboration*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Alexander, R. (2010) 'Legacies, policies and practice: one year on from the Cambridge Primary Review'. The 2010 Brian Simon Memorial Lecture at the University of London Institute of Education.

Audit Commission (2002) *Special educational needs – a mainstream issue*. London: Audit Commission.

Ballard, K. (1997) 'Researching disability and inclusive education: participation, construction and interpretation'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 1(3), 243-256.

Balshaw, M. (1999) *Help in the classroom* (2nd edition). London: David Fulton.

Bartolome, L.I. (1994) 'Beyond the methods fetish: towards a humanising pedagogy'. *Harvard education review*, 54, 2, 173-194.

Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (1998) 'Inside the black box: raising standards through classroom assessment'. *Phi delta kappan*, 80, 139-148.

Black-Hawkins, K., Florian, L. and Rouse, M. (2007) *Achievement and inclusion in schools*. London: Routledge.

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P. and Webster, R. (2009) 'The effect of support staff on pupil engagement and individual attention', *British educational research journal,* 35: 5, 661-686.

Booth, T. (1995) 'Mapping inclusion and exclusion: concepts for all'. in C. Clarke, A. Dyson and A. Millward (eds), *Towards inclusive schools*. London: David Fulton.

Booth, T. and Ainscow, M. (2011) *Index for inclusion; developing learning and participation in schools.* Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Brantlinger, E. (1997) 'Using ideology: cases of non-recognition of the politics of research and practice in special education'. *Review of educational research*, 67(4), 425-459.

Carrington, S. (1999) 'Inclusion needs a different school culture'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 3(3), 257-268.

Chadbourne, R. (1997) 'Teacher education in Australia: what difference does a new government make?' *Journal of education for teaching*, 23: 1, 7-28.

Chapman, C., Ainscow, M., Bragg, J., Gunter, H., Hull, J., Mongon, D., Muijs, D. and West, M. (2008) *Emerging patterns of school leadership: current practice and future directions*. Nottingham: NCSL.

Cigman, R. (ed.) (2006) *Included or excluded?* London: Routledge.

Copland, M.A. (2003) 'Leadership of inquiry: building and sustaining capacity for school improvement'. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, 25 (4), 375-395.

Davis, P. and Florian, L. (2004) *Teaching strategies and approaches for pupils with special educational needs: a scoping study*. DfES Research Report RR516. London: DfES.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *School workforce in England*. SFR 10/2008. London: DCSF.

Dyson, A. (2010) 'Developing inclusive schools: three perspectives from England'. *DDS – Die Deutsche Schule* 102 (2/2010), S. 115-129.

Dyson, A. (2006) 'Beyond the school gates: context, disadvantage and urban schools'. In: M. Ainscow & M. West (eds) *Improving urban schools: leadership and collaboration*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Dyson, A. and Millward, A. (2000) *Schools and special needs: issues of innovation and inclusion*. London: Paul Chapman.

Dyson, A., Howes, A. & Roberts, B. (2002) 'A systematic review of the effectiveness of school-level actions for promoting participation by all students'. In: *Research evidence in education library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. See **http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=276** [Accessed Oct 2011]

Elmore, P.L., Peterson, P.L. and McCarthy, S.J. (1996) *Restructuring in the classroom: teaching, learning and school organisation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Florian, L. and Black-Hawkins, K. (2010) 'Exploring inclusive pedagogy'. *British educational research journal*, July 2010.

Farrell, P. (ed.) (2002) *Making special education inclusive*. London: Fulton.

Farrell, P., Alborz, A., Howes, A. and Pearson, D. (2010) *The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils' academic achievement in mainstream schools: a review of the literature*. Manchester, UK: University of Manchester.

Freire, S. & César, M. (2003) 'Inclusive ideals/inclusive practices: How far is dream from reality? Five comparative case studies'. *European journal of special needs education*, 18(3), 341-354.

Fuchs, D. and Fuchs, L.S. (1994) 'Inclusive schools movement and the radicalization of special education reform'. *Exceptional children,* 60:4, 294-309.

Fulcher, G. (1989) *Disabling policies? a comparative approach to education policy and disability*. London: Falmer.

Fullan, M. (1991) *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Cassell.

Gyiamha, E.K., Sugden, B. and Pearson, S. (2009) 'Inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools in Ghana: influence of teachers' and children's characteristics'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 13: 8, 787-804.

Hargreaves, D.H. (1995) *School effectiveness and school improvement*. London: Routledge.

Hargreaves, D.H. (2003) *Education epidemic: transforming secondary schools through innovation networks*. London: Demos.

Hargreaves, A. (2004) 'Inclusive and exclusive educational change: emotional responses of teachers and implications for leadership'. *School leadership and management*, 24, 2: 287-309.

Hart, S. (1996) *Beyond special needs: enhancing children's learning through innovative thinking.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Hart, S. (2003) 'Learning without limits'. In M. Nind, K. Sheehy and K. Simmons (eds) *Inclusive education: learners and learning contexts*. London: Fulton.

Hart, S., Dixon, A., Drummond, M.J. and McIntyre, D. (2004) *Learning without limits*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hiebert, J., Gallimore, R. and Stigler, J.W. (2002) 'A knowledge base for the teaching profession: what would it look like and how can we get one?' *Educational researcher*, 31(5), 3-15.

Hopkins, D. (2001) *School improvement for real*. Lewes, UK: Falmer.

Hopkins, D., Ainscow, M. & West, M. (1994) *School improvement in an era of change*. London: Cassell.

Howes, A. and Ainscow, M. (2006) 'Collaboration with a city-wide purpose: making paths for sustainable educational improvement'. In M. Ainscow and M. West (eds) *Improving urban school: leadership and collaboration*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Huberman, M. (1993) 'The model of the independent artisan in teachers' professional relationships'. In J.W. Little and M.W. McLaughlin (eds) *Teachers' work: individuals, colleagues and contexts*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, R. (1989) *Learning together and alone: cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T. & Holubec, E. (1998) *Cooperation in the classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Johnston, K. and Hayes, D. (2007) 'Supporting student success at school through teacher professional learning: the pedagogy of disrupting the default modes of schooling'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 11, 3: 371-81.

Kugelmass, J. (2001) 'Collaboration and compromise in creating and sustaining an inclusive school'. *International journal of inclusive education*, 5 (1), 47-65.

Kugelmass, J. and Ainscow, M. (2004) 'Leadership for inclusion: a comparison of international practices'. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Meeting, Chicago.

Lamb, B. (2009) *Lamb Inquiry review of SEN and disability information*. London: DCSF.

Lambert, L., Walker, D., Zimmerman, D.P., Cooper, J.E., Lampert, M.D., Gardner, M.E. & Szabo, M. (1995) *The constructivist leader.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Leithwood, K.A. and Riehl, C.J. (2003) *What do we already know about successful school leadership?* Chicago: AERA Division: A Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D. and Steinbach, R. (1999) *Changing leadership for changing times*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Leo, E. and Barton, L. (2006) 'Inclusion, diversity and leadership: perspectives, possibilities and contradictions'. *Educational management administration and leadership*, 34, no. 2: 167-80.

Lewis, A. and Norwich, B. (2005) (eds) *Special teaching for special children: a pedagogy for inclusion?* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Lipman, P. (1997) 'Restructuring in context: a case study of teacher participation and the dynamics of ideology, race and power', *American educational research journal*, 34 (1), 3-37.

Lipsky, D.K. and Gartner, A. (1998) 'Factors for successful inclusion: Learning from the past, looking forward to the future'. In S.V. Vitello and D.E. Mithaug (eds) *Inclusive schooling: national and international perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lo, M.L., Yan, P.W. & Pakey, C.P.M. (eds) (2005) *For each and everyone: catering for individual differences through learning studies*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Lunt, I. and Norwich, B. (1999) *Perspectives on education policy: can effective schools be inclusive schools?* London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Messiou, K. (2006) 'Understanding marginalisation in education: the voice of children'. *European journal of psychology of education*, 21:3, 305-318.

Miles, S. and Ainscow, M. (2011) *Responding to diversity in schools*. London: Routledge.

Miles, S. & Singal, N. (2009) 'The Education for All and inclusive education debate: conflict, contradiction or opportunity?' *International journal of inclusive education*, October 2009, 1-15.

Mittler, P. (2000) *Working towards inclusive education: social contexts*. London: David Fulton.

Mittler, P. (2005) 'The global context of inclusive education: the role of the United Nations'. In D. Mitchell (ed.) *Contextualising inclusive education*. London: Routledge/Falmer.

Miles, S. & Kaplan, I. (2005) 'Using images to promote reflection: an action research study in Zambia and Tanzania'. *Journal of research in special educational needs*, 5(2), 77-83.

Moran, A. (2007) 'Embracing inclusive teacher education'. *European journal of teacher education,* 30:2 119-134.

Nes, K. and Stromstad, M. (2006) 'Strengthened adapted education for all – no more special education?' *International journal of inclusive education* 10:4, 363-378.

Pijl, S.J. and Meijor, C.J.W. (1991) 'Does integration count for much? An analysis of the practices of integration in eight countries'. *European journal of special needs education*, 3(2), 63-73.

Reynolds, M.C. and Ainscow, M. (1994) 'Education of children and youth with special needs: an international perspective'. In T. Husen and T.N. Postlethwaite (eds) *The international encyclopedia of education* (2nd edition). Oxford: Pergamon.

Riehl, C.J. (2000) 'The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: a review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration'. *Review of educational research,* 70(1), 55-81.

Robinson, V.M.J. (1998) 'Methodology and the research-practice gap'. *Educational researcher* 27, 17-26.

Rosenholtz, S. (1989) *Teachers' workplace: the social organisation of schools*. New York: Longman.

Rustemier, S. and Booth, T. (2005) *Learning about the index in use: a study of the use of the index for inclusion in schools and LEAs in England*. Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Senge, P.M. (1989) *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organisation.* London: Century.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (1992) *Moral leadership: getting to the heart of school improvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. (1985) *Organisational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Singal, N. (2008) 'Working towards inclusion: reflections from the classroom'. *Teaching and teacher education,* 24, 1516-29.

Skrtic, T. (1991) *Behind special education: a critical analysis of professional culture and school organization*. Denver: Love.

Slee, R. (1996) 'Inclusive schooling in Australia? Not yet'. *Cambridge journal of education*, 26(1), 19-32.

Stigler, J.W. and Hiebert, J. (1999) *The teaching gap*. New York: The Free Press.

Stoker, G. (2003) *Public value management: A new resolution of the democracy/efficiency trade off*. http://www.ipeg.org.uk/publications.htm [Accessed October 2010]

Takala, M., Pirttimaa, R. and Tormane, M. (2009) 'Inclusive special education: the role of special education teachers in Finland'. *British educational journal of special education*, 36:3, 162-172.

Thomas, G. and Loxley, A. (2001) *Deconstructing special education and constructing inclusion*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Trent, S.C., Artiles, A.J. and Englert, C.S. (1998) 'From deficit thinking to social constructivism: a review of theory, research and practice in special education'. *Review of research in education,* 23, 277-307.

Udvari-Solnar, A. (1996) 'Theoretical influences on the establishment of inclusive practices'. *Cambridge journal of education,* 26 (10), 101-120.

UNESCO (1990) *World declaration on Education for All*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (1994) *World conference on special needs education: access and quality*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2001) *The open file on inclusive education*. Paris: UNESCO.

Vitello, S.J. & Mithaug, D.E. (eds) (1998) *Inclusive schooling: national and international perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Webster, R., Russell, A. and Blatchford, P. (2010) 'A help or a hindrance?' *Every child journal*, 1.2, 64-67.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: CUP.

West, M., Ainscow, M. and Notman, H. (2003) *What leaders read: key texts from education and beyond*. Nottingham: NCSL.

Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The spirit level: why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Allen Lane.

Zollers, N.J., Ramanathan, A.K. and Yu, M. (1999) 'The relationship between school culture and inclusion: how an inclusive culture supports inclusive education'. *Qualitative studies in education*, 12, 2: 157-74.