Exploring inclusive pedagogy

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This paper reports on a study designed to examine teachers' craft knowledge of their practice of 'inclusion' in terms of what they do, why and how. The research approach offers an important alternative to studies of students with 'additional needs' and the search to articulate the specialist knowledge and skill required to teach them. Through classroom observations and interviews with 11 teachers of students across the full age range in two Scottish primary schools, we investigated how teachers *make meaning of the concept of inclusion* in their practice by exploring theoretical assumptions drawn from the literature about inclusive pedagogy. The analysis enabled us to identify practical examples of inclusive pedagogy that met the standard of extending what is generally available to everybody, as opposed to providing for all by differentiating for some. Examples of the inclusive pedagogical approach are provided.

Introduction

Every day, and as part of weekly, termly and yearly practices and routines, teachers make countless decisions and take innumerable actions in response to the learning of the students in their classes. All too often these decisions and actions are influenced by the assumptions of bell-curve thinking about ability, which have become naturalised in education (Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008), even though the negative effects of such thinking on conceptualisations of student ability have been of concern for many years (Gould, 1981; Gillard, 2009). In their summary of how limits can be imposed on students' learning by teachers who hold deterministic beliefs associated with bell-curve thinking about ability, Hart *et al.* (2007) point out that students who have been identified as having 'special' or 'additional'[1] educational needs are especially vulnerable to these negative effects. This vulnerability is compounded when teachers also believe that such students need specialist teaching that they have not been trained to provide, a common finding reported in the international research literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusive education

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(Lyser *et al.*, 1994; Avramidis *et al.*, 2000; Marshall *et al.*, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 2003; Lambert *et al.*, 2005; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Sharma *et al.*, 2008).

The study reported here was designed to explore questions about the knowledge and skills needed for teachers to be inclusive in their practice and the implications for teacher education and professional development that arise from it. Embracing 'both practice and scholarship' (Ball & Forzani, 2007), the aim of the research has been to bring together what teachers do, know and believe about inclusive classroom practice (Rouse, 2008), with the literature on inclusive approaches to teaching, as a way of developing understandings of what counts as evidence of inclusive pedagogy. We use the term inclusive pedagogy specifically to indicate a focus on 'the act of teaching and its attendant discourse' (Alexander, 2004, p. 11) and to draw distinctions between inclusive pedagogy and the terms inclusive education and inclusive practice.

Distinguishing between inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education and inclusive practice is important but problematic because the term 'inclusive' is used broadly in education and has many meanings. It is an educational concept that has defied precise definition. Although there is a broad consensus and understanding that inclusive education is 'a *process* of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of mainstream schools' (Booth *et al.*, 2000), this process can take many forms and little is known about the detail of practice at the classroom level. As a result, inclusive practice, the things that people *do* to give meaning to the concept of inclusion (Florian, 2009), is not well articulated. Inclusive practice also varies widely: from the very specific, for example, including children with disabilities in mainstream schools by relocating specialist provision from special to mainstream schools; to a very broad notion of responding to diversity among learners without recourse to categorisation. Both the relocation of specialist provision and the disregard for approaches based on categorical differences between groups of students raise questions about what constitutes good practice, what counts as evidence of such practice and how it can be known.

Studying inclusive pedagogy

Over the years, we have come to the view that the key challenge facing teachers who wish to become more inclusive in their practice is how to respect as well as respond to human differences in ways that include learners in, rather than exclude them from, what is ordinarily available in the daily life of the classroom (Florian, 2007). However, meeting this challenge sets a high standard for inclusive practice because extending what is ordinarily available to all learners is a complex pedagogical endeavour. It requires a shift in teaching and learning from an approach that works for *most* learners existing alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, towards one that involves the development of a rich learning community characterised by learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life (Florian & Linklater, 2009). Furthermore, the ways that teachers construct such environments are not easily visible to observers because:

- teachers' responses to individual differences occur while they are also doing other things;
- observers lack knowledge about the detailed context of teachers' actions underpinning their decision (e.g. planning, prior knowledge and experience etc.); and
- if observers focus on teachers' responses to differences between different groups of learners it is not easy for them to discern when teachers are extending what is ordinarily available in classrooms.

Understanding how teachers enrich and extend what is ordinarily available in a classroom lesson or activity offers an alternative perspective by which to consider inclusive education, practice and pedagogy compared to more traditional approaches to teaching children, which depend on the identification of individual needs. This is because these approaches are based upon the argument that some children necessarily require something 'different from' or 'additional to' that which is ordinarily available. Two questions have shaped the research:

1. What teaching strategies help to increase the participation and achievement of *all* children, including those identified as having special educational needs or requiring additional support for learning?
2. How can examples of inclusive pedagogy in action be articulated in ways that are useful to other teachers and supportive of their practice?

Methods

The research project set out to examine teachers' inclusive pedagogy, in terms of what they do, why and how. A focus on teacher craft knowledge seemed especially pertinent to this task because it offered an alternative to the 'additional needs' approach and the associated assumption that mainstream classroom teachers are themselves somehow deficient or lacking in the specialist knowledge and skill required to teach students who have been identified as having special educational needs. Thus the concept of craft knowledge provided an important counter to this because it emphasises individual teachers' successful practice and also recognises the complexity of their work, including the processes of reflective and practical problem-solving in which they continually engage (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). Through classroom observations and subsequent interviews we set out to encourage teachers to articulate how they make meaning of the concept of inclusion in their practice. Thus, a primary purpose of the research was not only to observe the teachers' inclusive pedagogy, but also to encourage them through interview to articulate their thinking about that practice.

The research itself took place in two primary schools in Scotland over a period of six months. The schools were selected because both were highly inclusive in terms of their intake and also because the staff in both had strongly articulated their support of inclusive policies and practices. It was essential that we worked with teachers whose classes comprised a diverse range of learners (including disabled students and others identified as having additional support needs) and who were committed to raising the

achievements of all children whilst safeguarding the inclusion of those who were more vulnerable to exclusion and other forms of marginalisation. In other words, since the over-riding aim of our research was to examine teachers' inclusive pedagogy in practice, we needed to study schools and classes where it was more likely to be taking place. We spent extended time in both schools. We began by making a number of informal visits in which we met the staff and children and talked to the headteachers about our research intentions. On later visits we focused on a smaller number of classes (five in one school and six in the other), observing their teachers for prolonged periods of time. In one school the teachers were self-selected; that is they chose whether or not to be involved in the research, although time constraints meant we were not able to work with all who volunteered. In the other school the headteacher said we were welcome to go to any class. In both schools we ensured that our final sample included classes from across the full age range of 3–12 years old (nursery to primary 7). During our observations we saw a variety of staff at work: not only the 11 class teachers, but also learning support teachers, learning support assistants, nursery nurses and other auxiliary staff.

Methodologically the study built on previous approaches we had developed. In particular, we adapted and extended the *Framework of participation* (see Black-Hawkins *et al.*, 2007 for original version; also Black-Hawkins, 2010) to enable us to focus our observations on the teachers' inclusive pedagogy. To do so we incorporated Rouse's (2008) insight that what teachers 'do', 'know' and 'believe', in terms of their inclusive classroom practices, are interrelated; and the nature of the interconnections between each of these three key aspects of their day-to-day classroom activities is such that any two will enhance the third (e.g. 'believing' and 'doing' enhances 'knowing' and so on). We then used a modified version of the *Framework* (see Table 1) to guide the collection of evidence from our observations of the 11 classes.

Before and after the observations, numerous informal conversations took place with the teachers involved. The purposes of these were: to clarify any immediate questions about the observations; to encourage the practitioners to begin to think about their inclusive pedagogy; and to help to build rapport in preparation for the extended interviews. In this way, an iterative process was established whereby the *Framework* structured the observation but the informal conversations focused it.

Finally, we interviewed the 11 class teachers (plus, for background information, a learning support teacher, a nursery nurse and a deputy headteacher). In preparation for the interviews with the class teachers we first reflected on the observations and informal discussions that had taken place with each of them by considering the observation field notes in the context of the *Framework* questions. In so doing, we drew on our own developing theoretical understandings of inclusive pedagogy (as outlined in the background sections of this paper) to help us to identify teaching strategies and approaches used by individual teachers that could be considered as tangible examples of their inclusive pedagogy in action. These then became the focus for the interviews in which we explored with each teacher how and why they had made the decisions and taken the actions that they had. This meant that although all the interviews followed a similar format, each one was prepared individually following this

Table 1.   Elements and questions, framework for participation in classrooms

1. Participation and access: being there
● Joining the class
● Staying in the class
● Access to spaces and places in the class
● Access to the curriculum
  ~ Who is given access and by whom? Who is denied access and by whom?
  ~ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote access? What are the teaching strategies and practices that reinforce barriers to access?
  ~ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class is greater access afforded to some individuals/groups? And, why is access withheld from some individuals/groups?

2. Participation and collaboration: learning together
● Children learning together in the class
● Members of staff learning together in the class
● Members of staff learning with others from beyond the class
  ~ Who learns together? Who does not learn together?
  ~ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote collaboration? What are the teaching strategies and practices that reinforce barriers to collaboration?
  ~ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class do some individuals/groups learn together? And, why are there barriers to some individuals/groups learning together?

3. Participation and achievement: inclusive pedagogy
● Members of staff using ('doing') inclusive pedagogy
● Members of staff knowing about inclusive pedagogy
● Members of staff believing in inclusive pedagogy
  ~ Who achieves? Who does not achieve?
  ~ What are the teaching strategies/practices that promote achievement for all? What are the teaching strategies/practices that reinforce barriers to achievement?
  ~ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class do some individuals/groups achieve? And, why are there barriers to the achievement of some individuals/groups?

4. Participation and diversity: recognition and acceptance
● Recognition and acceptance of children, by staff
● Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff
● Recognition and acceptance of children, by children
  ~ Who is recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? Who is not recognised and accepted as a person and by whom?
  ~ What are the teaching strategies and practices that promote recognition and acceptance? What are the teaching strategies and practices that form barriers to recognition and acceptance?
  ~ Why within the culture (values and beliefs) of the class are some individuals/groups recognised and accepted? And, why are there barriers to the recognition and acceptance of some individuals/groups?

preliminary consideration of the observations. At the same time, we were aware of the methodological challenges, noted earlier, when observing teachers' responses to children's differences within the context of whole-class teaching. Hence, we were careful to ensure that all teachers were given the opportunity to talk about aspects of their practice that were less visible during the observations (for example, expanding on the events of previous lessons in terms of their relationship to those which were

observed). Finally, all interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to 'capture' the words of the teachers and the transcripts were returned to and checked by the interviewees.

Analysis

The first level of analysis began as we drew upon our developing theoretical understandings of inclusive pedagogy to help us to identify events in the observation data to discuss with the teachers as we prepared the interview schedules described above. The subsequent second level of analysis focused primarily on the first research question: 'What teaching strategies help to increase the participation and achievement of *all* children, including those identified as having special educational needs or requiring additional support for learning?' Here we were interested in looking across the 11 interviews to explore three key assumptions we had made about inclusive pedagogy. These were that inclusive pedagogy requires:

1. A shift in focus from one that is concerned with only those individuals who have been identified as having 'additional needs', to learning for all—the idea of everybody (not most and some);
2. Rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability (and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others); and
3. Ways of working with and through other adults that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the community of the classroom.

We used these assumptions to support a deductive approach to the preliminary analysis of the data, focusing on each teacher's discussion of the particular teaching strategies that had been previously identified from their observations. Thus, we engaged in a further iterative process in which we reflected on practice through the lens of our developing theoretical ideas. We also combined this with a more inductive approach, allowing further ideas and concerns relating to the teachers' inclusive pedagogy to emerge from the interviews, which in turn helped to shape our analytical themes.

This process enabled each theme to be further formulated in terms of what teachers 'do' by:

1. Shifting the focus from one that is concerned with only those individuals who have been identified as having 'additional needs' to the learning of all children in the community of the classroom:
   - creating learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life;
   - extending what is ordinarily available for *all* learners (creating a rich learning community) rather than using teaching and learning strategies that are suitable for *most* alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for *some* who experience difficulties; and
   - focusing on *what* is to be taught (and *how*) rather than *who* is to learn it.

2. Rejecting deterministic beliefs about ability as being fixed and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others:
    *   believing that *all* children will make progress, learn and achieve;
    *   focusing teaching and learning on what children can do rather than what they can not do;
    *   using a variety of grouping strategies to support everyone's learning rather than relying on ability grouping to separate ('able' from 'less able' students); and
    *   using formative assessment to support learning.
3. Seeing difficulties in learning as professional challenges for teachers, rather than deficits in learners, that encourage the development of new ways of working:
    *   seeking and trying out new ways of working to support the learning of all children;
    *   working with and through other adults that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the community of the classroom; and
    *   being committed to continuing professional development as a way of developing more inclusive practices.

Whilst there are, inevitably, considerable connections and overlaps between all three themes we did not see this as a problem in our analysis as they were not used as a 'check-list' to simply note their 'presence' or 'absence'. To do so would have diminished the complexity of the teachers' practice, their actions and decision-making. We were clear that we did not want to smooth away ambiguity and difficulties inherent in the everyday context of their classrooms. We were also mindful of our second research question: 'How can examples of inclusive pedagogy in action be articulated in ways that are useful to other teachers and supportive of their practice?' For these examples to be recognised by, and have professional meaning for, other practitioners it was crucial that we maintained the integrity of the teachers' own words to provide rich detailed narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) of their inclusive pedagogy in action.

Findings

Three findings emerged from our analysis. The first was that teachers who wish to use inclusive pedagogy to support the achievement of all children face a number of challenges and dilemmas in practice. For example, a school's policy on setting may make it difficult for a teacher to use alternative grouping strategies in some lessons. This is an unsurprising finding that has been well documented by many others, most recently by Norwich (2008). The second finding was that teachers' practice is often varied and can be considered to meet the standard of inclusive pedagogy, that is, extending what is ordinarily available to all in some ways but not in others. As a result, teachers sometimes engage in practices that seemed less inclusive than those we have chosen to highlight below as meeting that standard of inclusive pedagogy. This finding is also unsurprising and has been reported elsewhere (e.g. Benjamin *et al.*, 2003). These contradictions require further scrutiny but, as noted above, the important point is

that there are constraints within education systems and across schools that counter teachers' efforts to be inclusive in their practices.

As Hart *et al.* (2007) argued, the determinist beliefs that pervade education policy make it difficult for teachers to take alternative decisions and actions that reject such beliefs. They point out that in England, for example, school inspectors are trained to judge the extent to which teaching is differentiated by ability level despite the large body of research that documents its negative effects on teacher expectation, student self-perception and curriculum development (e.g. Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Ireson & Hallam, 2001). Presumably, this practice occurs because the English guidance for school inspectors specifies that in order 'to identify what it means to be an inclusive school' inspectors must attend 'to the provision made for and the achievement of different groups of pupils' within it (Ofsted, 2000, p. 4). The situation is much the same in Scotland, where the school inspectorate guidance for the school self-evaluation quality indicator for 'delivery of education: meeting learning needs' considers similar evidence (i.e. 'match learning activities to the needs of individual learners and groups with differing abilities or aptitudes') to be 'very good' (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, p. 29). These examples provide a clear illustration of the kind of dilemmas teachers face as well as a partial explanation for the 'contradictions' that appear in their practice. In this case they must both reject and use ability grouping to prove they are inclusive in their practice. However, differentiation becomes a valuable strategy for supporting the learning of everyone when it is used in an 'elastic and creative' way rather than as a 'simplistic linear' means of sorting pupils into more or less able (Nind, 2005, p. 4).

The third, and potentially more useful, finding from our analysis was that by focusing on the craft knowledge of teachers' inclusive pedagogy we have been able to identify a number of strategies that both meet our standard of inclusive pedagogy and fulfil our conceptual criterion of attending to individual differences, while avoiding the stigma of marking some students as different. This is illustrated in Table 2, where the inclusive pedagogical approach is contrasted with an additional needs approach to inclusive practice. As is shown, inclusive pedagogy is defined not in the *choice* of strategy but in its *use*. While the additional needs approach to inclusion focuses only on the student who has been identified as in need of additional support, the inclusive pedagogical approach focuses on everybody in the community of the classroom. Two strategies chosen from our data set are presented in Table 2. These were described by the teachers who used them as 'work choice' and 'play zone'.

As examples of strategies, 'work choice' and 'play zone' show how teachers are responsive to individual differences between learners but do not isolate some because they are thought to need something different. In the additional needs approach, the focus of differentiation is on the individual needs of students who have been identified as having disabilities or difficulties in learning. In this approach, attention is focused on how to ensure that the student identified as needing something 'additional' or 'different' to others in the class can participate in the lesson. The outcome in both examples is that the students with 'individual needs' are marginalised within the class. In the inclusive pedagogical approach, attention is paid to everybody. Individual

Table 2.   Inclusive pedagogy: individualised versus everybody approach

Strategy	Individualised approach to inclusion: most and some		Inclusive pedagogical approach: everybody
Work choice	Classroom teacher consults with colleagues in learning support about how to differentiate learning tasks so that specific accommodations for students with special educational needs are met		
	Manifest in terms of inclusion: All students are working at the appropriate levels with work choices that have been pre-determined and selected to respond to individual needs. One student works individually with a learning support assistant. Other students are required to complete fewer or simpler tasks	*Manifest in terms of exclusion:* Students see that work is set at different levels based on student ability. They know who is smart and who is not. They see that some students cannot do the work without extra help from another adult and others are not expected to need help There is an assumption that the teacher has set the work at the 'appropriate level', possibly putting a ceiling on expectations for some students	Students choose how, where, when and with whom they learn Teachers create options and consult with each student about how they can help Teachers create the conditions that support students to work with different groups Classroom teacher consults with colleagues including those in learning support to share ideas about teaching and learning Students are trusted to make good decisions about their learning
Play zone	Play zone is an area of the classroom where a range of active play choices are provided. Teachers select activities that are matched to individual student needs		
	Manifest in terms of inclusion: Rather than leave the classroom for physical therapy, a student with cerebral palsy is given physical therapy exercises that support his gross motor development. The teacher and/or classroom assistant do these exercises with him in the play zone during free time so that the student does not miss out on other structured activities	*Manifest in terms of exclusion:* The student with cerebral palsy remains in the mainstream classroom for the full day but does not have opportunities to play with other children. There is some concern that his language is not developing because he is not talking in the nursery	The play zone is a place where student learning is self-directed. By assessing how the student with cerebral palsy used his time in the play zone, the teacher was able to note that the student could talk when he wanted to because there was no pressure to do so. As a result of following the lead set by the student, the teacher is able to see progress that might otherwise have been obscured

differences between learners are accommodated through the choice of tasks and activities that are available to all without the stigmatising effects of marking some students as different or pre-determining the learning that is possible. The outcome here is that learners' needs are met but individual students are not marginalised within the class. In the sections below, extended extracts from two of the interviews (Helen and Morag) further illustrate the inclusive pedagogical approach.

Work choice

At the time of the research, Helen was in her fourth year of teaching and was working with a Primary 7 class (11–12-year-olds). She had been collaborating closely with another more experienced teacher in the school who also taught Primary 7. She described this experience as 'fantastic':

> I've learned a lot about inclusion…just because in a way Sarah is a role model for me. …It's great because we just shoot ideas off each other and it's brilliant having two heads together.

They met weekly to plan their teaching together across the two classes. They had established a thematic approach to the curriculum and organised their teaching and the children's learning around this in a flexible way, which they called 'work choice'. This approach was intended to create a community of learners across the two classes in which all children were given opportunities to shape what, how, where, when and with whom they learnt. Working collaboratively with Sarah in this way had given Helen confidence to try out this new way of teaching and learning. Indeed, throughout the interview she described how she was continually modifying her approaches and ideas.

  In Extract 1 Helen talks about how she tries to support all children so that they are able to benefit from the opportunities offered through 'work choice', including those who have 'a slower pace of work'. In the context of this, her conversation with one child offers a clear example of how she is able to adapt her teaching to the needs of children by extending what is ordinarily available to all children in the class, rather than by making 'different' or 'additional' provision for some individuals who might be considered to be experiencing difficulties in their learning. Extract 1 also illustrates how Helen's decision is made in collaboration with the child. Her actions are intended to find a way to support the child to make progress and to experience success, within the context of the whole class. The development of 'work choice' more generally also supports these principles and contributes to Helen's intentions to develop a rich learning community:

> Extract 1
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> …those as well, who find the work choice as a skill quite difficult to get used to because there are some who do have a slower pace of work so we've got to support them…and so quite often we would sit down one-to-one….Last week I said to a boy where could I help him? And he was telling me where he could help me…what's distracting him and…where he needed to sit in the classroom, who was beside him, etc., how long he spent on, perhaps, an extra activity like Connect…it wasn't really realistic to be spending so much time on that when he had all his other jobs to be getting done. So he could recognise it but I could recognise as well that for him, mental maths, for example, the whole unit was just too

much for him to try and get through every week. So we came to an agreement where we did just half a unit instead….And so that at the end of the week he experiences that feeling of 'Yes, I've got all my job done'.

Extract 2 provides another illustration that whilst Helen recognises that there are differences between learners, the starting point of her approach to the particular needs of this child is to strengthen her inclusion within ordinary classroom life. When questioned by the interviewer about drawing on specialist support to help the child, she explains that she does not need to because the way her class is organised allows her to take appropriate action. She does so in two ways: first, by making use of the flexible grouping arrangements in the class that are part of 'work choice' and, second, by developing her own skills as a teacher when managing classroom discussions:

Extract 2

One girl in the class…it's her social skills because she's Primary 7, she's going to Academy next year…seeing how I can help her develop her confidence.

[Interviewer: Do you have any support in terms of that?]

I can if I want to but because of the way that the class is set up I can actually deal with it myself by ensuring she's working with different groups all the time….She's not always on the same seat. She doesn't always have the same people around her. And the way that I question the children when we're having a discussion, she knows that she's going to have to give more feedback…I was pleased this morning because she's just so quiet, painfully shy, quietly spoken, that she actually opened up a bit more because, in a way, she's knowing that it's not pressurising her to do it but she's knowing that she's going to have to develop that. So that helps as well.

Here again, there is a sense that Helen is willing to seek out other ways to help children participate in class activities by experimenting with different ideas and approaches. Because everybody has 'work choice' the boy in Extract 1 who could not manage the whole unit of mental maths is not isolated in the way he might be if an individualised 'additional support' approach were used. Likewise, the girl in Extract 2 is supported to increase her participation in the classroom activity without calling attention to her lack of confidence.

 In the final extract from Helen's interview she describes one particular aspect of 'work choice': that is, when children are given a range of differentiated approaches to a task but are expected to choose for themselves which to take. In this example the children were asked to write a poem about the moon and various resources were provided to support their work. Here again the intention was to create learning opportunities that were sufficiently available for everyone, so all children were able to participate in the activity. The focus was on *what* was to be taught (including a range of possible *hows*) rather than on *who* was to learn it. The children were trusted to make good decisions about their new learning, but were supported by being given the tools necessary to experience success. This extract also provides an example of Helen learning from her past practices and seeking to find new ways of working to support the learning of all children. She had become aware not only of how children can be stigmatised through teacher-determined differentiation, but also that doing so can set

limits on children's learning and teacher expectations. Finally, although the extract does not refer to this, during the observations of Helen's class a number of children were working on their moon poems. They were actively encouraged by her to work collaboratively, sharing ideas and resolving problems together and, in so doing, extending further the resources available to support learning in the class:

Extract 3

I actually leave it open to them. They have the options there if they don't feel confident enough or they don't feel ready to do their own poem, that's where they could use the Robert Louis Stevenson's model. …I think as well that if you make that decision for them, they might be desperately wanting to do their own poem. …They know what's expected of them so why can't they just give it a go on their own?…teacher directed differentiated tasks…sometimes it's necessary but sometimes it's not necessary.…I just learned that from last year's group…especially those children that would be in the class from the base, because I did differentiate it more often then…they felt that they weren't as good as the others so they were quite embarrassed about it if they had to do an easier task. …So it's better to have the option. …There were some as well who started using the model and followed the model and then it was as though they really gain more confidence when it came to do the last verse. They would come and say, 'Instead of using the model, can I write my own last verse?' 'Why not? Yes.'

Play zone

The second example is taken from the interview with Morag, who was in her eighth year of teaching at the time of the research. Then she was working in the nursery, although she had previously taught in Primary 1, 2 and 3 in the same school. The nursery is an open plan space, staffed by two teachers and two nursery nurses. Like Helen, Morag valued working collaboratively with other adults throughout her school, in terms of planning and sharing ideas. Colleagues were also seen as a source of support when helping to resolve difficulties in teaching:

That makes a big difference…you don't feel that you're going to be judged, if you do admit that you're finding maybe a particular class quite challenging or a particular pupil quite difficult and you're just open to suggestions from other members of the school.…You have to be open and say does anybody have any ideas about the strategies that I could try, helping each other out and being honest about how the day has gone.

The nursery is organised around the 'play zone', where a range of active play choices are provided, intended to encourage the participation of all learners, including those identified as experiencing learning difficulties. In Extract 4 Morag discusses the integral role of play in creating a learning community in which children and teachers learn together. Later in the extract she reflects on how her thinking has shifted over time and through the support and encouragement of colleagues:

Extract 4

It's the independence and…it's really good for their friendships and their confidence, because they're choosing where they play.…If you ever stand back and watch all the children in nursery they're always busy, it's very rare that you see somebody standing there

not engaged in an activity.…It's really interesting in terms of writing your observations, to listen to the conversations they have without the adult interaction. As a teacher you can gain so much from playing with the children at those activities.…You get to know the children really well…as well as knowing whether your children have a knowledge of colour, shape, number, all the formal learning that takes place.…You also get to know the children in terms of their confidence, in terms of their ability to share resources.…If you're not there to observe them and to help them, I don't mean that if they do something different in their activities then they're not learning anything, but…this experience of the play zone in the nursery has made me realise that's not really just enough to assume that they have learnt what you think…

When I was asked by the headteacher if I would like to set up the play zone in the main school, some years earlier, I was really excited about the opportunity, but something I found hard personally was not having all the children in their seats…that just goes to show how wrong I had that in my head…I would never work where I had all of the children in the corner and all of the children at their seats, and a group up for reading, but that's the way that I had worked before.…Probably five years ago, I would have had play set up in my classroom, but once they'd finished their language and maths they would have gone onto it as a treat…it makes me cringe when I look back to it. So I would say it's been a learning experience for myself, and I know for other colleagues as well as the children.

In the first half of the following extract (Extract 5), Morag describes how she made use of the assessment of a child to inform her understanding of how she could support his learning within the teaching opportunities available in the class. Assessing him in this way enabled her to celebrate his progress, focusing on what he could do rather than what he could not. In the second half of this extract she describes a similar experience of her colleague with another child: reinforcing the importance of recognising that all children can make progress, learn and achieve:

Extract 5

He started with me last summer…the doctor thought that he had cerebral palsy. He wasn't talking in the nursery, he required huge support with his gross motor skills…he wasn't interacting with the other children and adults when they came in, [so] I decided to start writing an assessment every day and it was really interesting, because…where he was talking and he was interacting with the other children, it was nice to see…the changes.…He was very uncomfortable about talking to other children but because of the way the nursery is set up, his talking was always on his terms and I think that encouraged him a lot, because he could talk when he wanted to but there was no pressure to at other times. It's so lovely to see. Whereas there was a spot on the carpet that he would stand on for the majority of the session, and he didn't talk to anyone, and he didn't interact with the children, or even play independently. Now, every day he's busy throughout the session and even though he's still not talking very much, the fact that he's settling down at an activity is fantastic and if [colleague] hadn't kept that record because he still wasn't talking, it maybe wouldn't have seemed like such a brilliant progress.

Although none of the extracts suggests easy solutions to the dilemmas that face teachers who wish to use an inclusive pedagogical approach to support the achievement of all children, they do help to articulate how the inclusive pedagogical approach is distinguished from additional needs approaches to inclusive education (as displayed in Table 2). They also show how teachers grapple with the concept of

everybody, how they resist deterministic thinking about the abilities of the students in their classes and how they attempt to work creatively with others to develop classroom communities.

Discussion

Students who have been identified as having special educational needs are especially vulnerable to exclusion from the culture, curriculum and community of mainstream schools because of the determinist beliefs that underpin them (Hart *et al.*, 2007). This is exacerbated by the widespread belief that mainstream classroom teachers are not well-prepared to work with such students, but little is known about exactly what teachers need to know in order to teach all students in inclusive schools. Lack of clarity about definitions of inclusion has contributed to confusion about inclusive education and practice, as well as to debates about whether or not inclusion is an educationally sound practice for students who have been identified as having special or additional educational needs.

In an attempt to address the complex issues involved in the provision of a meaningful 'education for all', we have been developing the concept of inclusive pedagogy. Our conceptualisation of inclusive pedagogy focuses on how to extend what is ordinarily available in the community of the classroom as a way of reducing the need to mark some learners as different. This is underpinned by a shift in pedagogical thinking from an approach that works for *most* learners existing alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for those (*some*) who experience difficulties, towards one that involves providing rich learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for *everyone*, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life. This new approach to individual differences is distinguished from earlier notions about inclusive education and inclusive practice, which are based on the process of providing for all by differentiating for some. By focusing on what is to be learned by the community of learners in a classroom, the inclusive pedagogical approach aims to avoid the problems and stigma associated with marking some learners as different. The challenge for us as researchers has been to describe this complex process in operation. Our findings lead us to conclude that it is how teachers address the issue of inclusion in their daily practice—reflected in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about learners and learning, as well as in the things that they do and the responses that they make when the students they teach encounter barriers to learning—that determines their inclusive pedagogical approach.

Our findings are of particular relevance and importance to teachers who are committed to the principles of inclusion but work in education systems dominated by policy and practice that rely on bell-curve thinking such as developmental norms to assess learning and identify and categorise learners by ability level. Such practice, while widespread, often serves to limit rather than enhance the learning and achievement that is possible for far too many children in school. An inclusive pedagogical approach, based on the assumptions, actions and the approach to everybody described here offers a subtle but important shift in how teachers might respond to

individual differences in ways that avoid the stigma of judging some students as less able. The findings have important implications for teacher education and professional development. First, they offer suggestions about the things teachers can do as well as ways to do them. Second, they provide a partial explanation for why such practice is difficult to develop and sustain. Finally, the insights obtained from the study of teacher craft knowledge (Black-Hawkins *et al.*, 2009) can be used to reflect on questions about what teachers need to know and how they should be prepared for and supported to work in schools that are inclusive of all learners.

Note

1. While Scotland has embraced the concept of 'additional support for learning' to refer to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support for learning, the definition of additional support remains that 'which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision that is generally provided' (Scottish Executive, 2005).

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