ARTÍCULO ORIGINAL

Applying the principles of inclusive pedagogy in initial teacher education: from university based course to classroom action

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes how the key concepts of inclusive pedagogy have been embedded in a one-year initial teacher education course, the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. It discusses how beginning teachers who have completed the PGDE but now work in different contexts are using the concept of inclusive pedagogy in their classrooms.

KEY WORDS: Inclusive pedagogy; Teacher Education; Social justice; Begining teachers

Aplicar los principios de la pedagogía inclusiva en la formación inicial del profesorado: de una asignatura en la Universidad a la acción en el aula

RESUMEN: Este artículo describe cómo se han incluido los conceptos clave de la pedagogía inclusiva en un curso anual de formación inicial del profesorado, el *Professional Graduate Diploma in Education* (PGDE), de la Universidad de Aberdeen, Escocia. Asimismo, analiza cómo el profesorado principiante que ha finalizado sus estudios de PGDE y trabaja actualmente en diferentes contextos pone en práctica el concepto de pedagogía inclusiva en el aula.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Pedagogía inclusiva; Formación de Profesorado; Justicia Social; Profesores principiantes

1. INTRODUCTION

Based in the University of Aberdeen, Scotland's Inclusive Practice Project (IPP) was developed in partnership with colleagues in the School of Education, partner local authorities

and schools, the professional associations and trade unions, the Scottish Government Education Department, the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) and the school's inspectorate (HMIE). Funded by the Scottish Government (2006-10), this initiative coincided with large-scale curricular reform across Scotland associated with the introduction of the *Curriculum for Excellence*, (Scottish Executive, 2004) which emphasises more inclusive approaches to teaching and learning and a strong commitment to social justice.

The initiative has its roots in a growing recognition that teachers are not sufficiently well prepared for dealing with the range of differences in schools of today. In the Scottish context this is associated with a policy imperative that is trying to broaden definitions of inclusion and an acknowledgement that learning support should be available to a wider group of children than those who had previously been described as having special educational needs. The project was initiated in a national context of educational reform that was responding to concerns about the 'long tail of underachievement' in Scottish schools (OECD, 2007).

2. RATIONALE FOR THE APPROACH

Policy demands for inclusion have often been met with notional responses whereby all children attend school in the same building but continue to receive separate 'in house' provision for those identified as having 'special needs'. Such divisions are also often evident within mixed-ability classrooms, whereby teachers differentiate work, according to perceptions of ability (Hamilton and O'Hara, 2011). These approaches perpetuate labels of 'special needs' (Riddell, 2007) and have been shown to place a ceiling on the learning opportunities of those thought to be less able (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004). An alternative view maintains that social and educational inclusion can only be achieved when these practices are disrupted and replaced with other more participatory approaches to teaching and learning (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson 2006).

Often driven by a socio-cultural perspective on learning, many commentators have suggested that inclusion involves children learning together, in a context where each individual is valued and is actively engaged in what is learnt and what is taught. Thus inclusion is not viewed as passive, being 'done to' certain groups of children, but as a dynamic process which involves all children in the life and learning of the school. The role of teachers is critical in bringing about such changes in approach (Forlin, 2001), and Rouse (2009) suggests that this depends on teachers 'knowing' (about theoretical, policy and legislative issues), 'doing' (turning knowledge into action) and 'believing' (in their capacity to support all children).

The Inclusive Practice Project was influenced by research on the role of specialist knowledge (Florian and Kershner, 2009), and achievement and inclusion in schools that has challenged the widespread perception that the inclusion of pupils with difficulties in learning will hold back the progress of others. Indeed, it is increasingly accepted that, when implemented properly, inclusive education results in benefits for all learners (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse, 2007). Building on this research, and a series of studies of teacher craft knowledge (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012) we have been working to understand how the concept of inclusive pedagogy might be embedded into courses of initial teacher education (ITE). This is important because the study of craft knowledge combines a theoretical exploration of observed classroom practice with focused discussions with teachers to explore how their successful practices can inform professional development for other teachers and student teachers. Teachers' craft knowledge is then used to inform and extend our developing theoretical understanding of inclusive pedagogy. In this way, the work relies upon a 'a dialogic cycle of knowledge-creation' by which researchers, teachers and students inform and challenge the thinking and practices of each other by drawing on and sharing their different types of knowledge.

3. INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

It has been known for three decades that provision of education predicated on predictions of 'potential' on the basis of current achievement, reproduces social inequalities (e.g. Ball, 1981), by reifying hierarchies (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004) and by undermining the sense of sense of self-worth in some pupils (Hargreaves 1982, Boaler, William y Brown, 2000). Inclusive pedagogy rejects ability labeling, and offers an alternative framework for organizing learning. Informed by the work of Susan Hart and her colleagues (Hart, op cit), inclusive pedagogy urges teachers to create environments which do not limit the expectations of both teacher and pupils. Specifically inclusive pedagogy is opposed to practices which address education for all by offering provision for most with additional or different experiences for some. Instead it demands that teachers extend what is ordinarily available so that it is accessible to all (Florian, 2010).

The notion of inclusive pedagogy is not a call for a return to a model of whole class teaching where equality is notionally addressed by providing identical experiences for all. Instead it advocates an approach whereby the teacher provides a range of options which are available to everybody. Human diversity is seen within the model of inclusive pedagogy as a strength, rather than a problem, as children work together, sharing ideas and learning from their interactions with each other. The inclusive pedagogical approach fosters an open-ended view of each child's potential to learn.

3.1. Embedding the concept of inclusive pedagogy in teacher education

A central task for the IPP was to work with teacher education colleagues who deliver the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), to explore the different ways in which teachers and schools can become more inclusive of children who might have found learning and participation difficult in the past. This collaborative work aimed to develop a shared understanding of inclusive pedagogy, which was built into the programme (Florian, 2012, Florian, Young and Rouse, 2010).

The PGDE is a one year full-time, or two year part-time post-graduate course for both primary and secondary teachers. Successful completion of the course qualifies students to teach in schools, although full registration is only achieved after a probationary year in post. Full time students spend eighteen weeks in the university, and the remaining 24 weeks are spent on placement in two different schools.

The taught component of the course consists of a common core – the Professional Studies unit, which students combine with a menu of curricular studies, specific to their speciality. The Professional Studies unit consists of workshops, lectures and online learning, all of which are part of the weekly pattern when students are on campus. It is in the common core of the Professional Studies unit that the concepts of Inclusion and Social Justice are explored theoretically, and discussed in the practical context of the students' school experience. Inherent within the three themes that underpin the programme are challenges to many of the existing beliefs and practices that students may encounter when working in schools. Each theme is outlined below.

The theme 'Understanding Learning' is based on the principle that difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning. Such a view challenges deterministic views of children's' abilities and educational practices that are based on assumptions of a normal distribution of intelligence.

The theme of 'Social Justice' places expectations on teachers that they are responsible for the learning of all children; a stance which requires them to conceptualise difficulties in student learning as dilemmas for the teacher, rather than as shortcomings in the pupils. This approach requires that teachers reject notions of inclusive practice that are based on provision for 'most' alongside something different for 'some', but instead it requires them

to extend what is ordinarily available for all learners (creating a rich learning community).

The third theme, 'Becoming an Active Professional' requires that teachers must constantly seek new ways to support the learning of all children. A key tenet of this principle is finding ways of working with and through others to enhance the participation and improve the learning experience of everyone in the community of the classroom. This presents a challenge to traditional divisions between 'mainstream' teachers who are responsible for the learning of most students and 'specialists' who work with some children who have been identified as having 'special needs'. Instead it suggests that adults work together to find better ways of supporting all children.

Delivery of courses to PGDE students based on the principles of inclusive pedagogy, as embedded in the three course themes 'Understanding Learning', 'Social Justice' and Becoming an Active Professional' was the strategy adopted to ensure that student teachers were educated to become 'inclusive practitioners'. Inclusive practitioners are new teachers fully versed in, and committed to, notions of inclusive pedagogy, and its enactment in practice.

The IPP conducted a follow-up study of programme graduates. This study was designed to build on the theoretical foundations of the course, to explore how these foundations were enacted in practice, and to identify where new teachers find the facilitators and the barriers to adopting inclusive pedagogy.

3.2. Follow up study

Seven teachers, employed in three Scottish local authorities were involved in this study, which took place during their probationary year. All participants were female, four worked in the primary sector and three were secondary teachers. This small sample was not intended to be representative of the entire cohort of PGDE graduates, as the study was not seeking to make evaluative claims about the PGDE course. However, the sample did allow an in-depth

examination of how the concept of inclusive pedagogy was enacted by these new teachers. Once the probationary teachers had accepted the invitation to participate, the consent of head teachers was sought. In this way potential ethical problems were avoided as the new teachers made a free choice without any influence from their managers. Three research visits were made to each participant during their probationary year. Each visit comprised of an observation of a teaching session coupled with a subsequent semi-structured interview of about 45 minutes.

We were aware that making judgments about inclusive pedagogy on the basis of observation can be problematic. An observer may misinterpret a teacher's actions towards individuals or groups of children due to lack of knowledge about the context, such as their planning, their reasoning or the history behind a particular interaction. Equally it is not easy for an observer to know when and how teachers are extending what is ordinarily available in classrooms without detailed knowledge of the diversity of children within the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Hence observation and interview were paired, to allow discussion of the pedagogical principles underpinning classroom activities. Data from the two sources were triangulated to enhance the depth of understanding of pedagogy in each context.

With the agreement of participants, interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Observation notes and interview transcripts were analysed using the inclusive pedagogy framework that we developed as a tool to provide systematic evidence of inclusive pedagogy in action (Rouse & Florian, 2012; Florian & Spratt, 2013). Drawing from research observations and interview data, our own analysis and research conversations with colleagues we were able to build up a robust, yet responsive, model demonstrating the implications of inclusive pedagogy for classroom practice.

In analyzing the complex sets of knowledge, beliefs and practice in beginning teachers we were acknowledged that these are

not discrete and separate functions of an inclusive teacher, Clearly, a teacher's understanding of social justice would be intertwined with her beliefs about learning as she made choices about how to respond to learner differences in the classroom. This fluidity is evident in the examples presented below.

4. USING THE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The analytical framework was based on the three key principles that underpin inclusive pedagogy:

1. Difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning;

2. Teachers must believe (can be convinced) they are qualified/capable of teaching all children;

3. The profession must continually develop creative new ways of working with others.

As noted above, these three principles are aligned with the three PGDE course themes: Understanding learning; Understanding social justice and; Becoming an active professional.

Below, a small sample of data has been selected, with the purpose of demonstrating how the analytical framework was used to interpret the data. Short vignettes from three participants, (pseudonyms: Mary, Dianne and Chloe) have been chosen as illustrative. Description from observation and / or a section of transcript are presented in relation to a particular aspect of each the teacher's work. This is followed by a demonstration of how the framework was used to identify how the principles of inclusive pedagogy were being used in that setting.

Mary taught a Primary 5 class in an inner city primary school in an area of deprivation. Observation of an English language lesson revealed use of an approach which encouraged learning in a collaborative manner. Children were organized in 4 mixed groups, and on each of four tables a different shared activity was offered, all of which were designed to encourage the children to think about the use of the articles 'a' and 'an'. On one table was placed a large sheet of paper on which the group were asked to fill in two columns, one of 'a words' and one of 'an words'. A second table bore a similar sheet of paper on which a long list of nouns were written and the children asked to decide which article was appropriate. A third table offered a set of word cards which the children sorted into 'a' and 'an' piles, and on the final table was sited a board game along the same theme. Each activity was undertaken as a group. After a few minutes on their first activity the groups moved to a new table. This continued until all groups had worked at all tables. Thus everyone in the class had participated in each activity. Finally, in a class plenary the two large sheets of paper were brought to the front of the class and discussed as a whole class exercise, then later displayed on the wall.

Using the themes of the analytical framework, this approach can be seen as aligning with the philosophy of inclusive pedagogy, resonating in particular with the principle 'difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualization of learning'. Mary had created a learning environment available for everybody, in which children were learning together, through co-construction. Ability labeling was avoided as the children worked in mixed groups,

and it was unclear how each child had contributed to the final product, thus no public attribution could be made to quality of individual contributions. There was scope for children to choose to contribute at different levels, as evidenced by one girl reaching for a dictionary to look up the word 'encyclopedia', whilst others drew different words from their vocabulary. By avoiding the use of personal exercise books, and instead displaying the class work on the wall, this approach also ensured that all children,

regardless of their own current level of achievement had access to a record of the collective achievement of the group, and could learn from the contributions of their peers.

Dianne is a secondary teacher in a small city. She was particularly keen to break down the barriers between her mainstream classroom and the 'Special Needs Base'. When asked whether she would be happy to include a pupil with ADHD in her Secondary 1 class[i] she responded with enthusiasm (unlike some of her colleagues who refused). In the excerpt below she expressed her views

Diane: *So for me it was really lovely that I was approached two weeks ago by the Special Needs department to say Sean (pseudonym) is getting on really well, he's keen to try (integration into mainstream), and so I went down, I took him the books and everything that we've done and had a little interview with him which kind of made him feel a bit important. And that was really nice, to meet him in his environment with the people he knows and the things that he knows, and then he was really pleased to impress me, which he did, and we set up some little tasks for him to do and then we decided on a date when he could come in and who would be coming in with him. So he came to see the classroom before hand, and I did tag who he knew in the class and actually he knew quite a lot of people so that was quite lucky. But what I didn't want him to do was to arrive not having met me, not sure of where the classroom was, not knowing the children or whatever. So we did all this and he came on the first day and it went really well.*

Interviewer: *You said earlier … that he's allowed the freedom to choose if he wants to leave the lesson if he can't cope.*

Diane: *Yes, that's part of the strategies that we've put...we have to give him a way out because that would be like keeping him in a cage and that could not be...but at the same time we are still trying to make sure that he understands that being mainstream means that there are more restrictions and that we have to look out for the good of the larger number and he has to kind of slot into that, so we're trying to make it as gentle a transition as possible but we also have to acknowledge that he has these needs and so if he needs to go then that's fine.*

Dianne's attitude reflected a key principle of social justice, that she believed she was capable of teaching all children. She responded to Sean's individuality by preparing carefully for his introduction to her class, and made efforts to develop a relationship with him prior to the transfer. Thus, rather than identifying him as being in deficit, she interpreted the situation as a professional challenge to herself to respond thoughtfully to the difficulties Sean may encounter when moving to her class. Throughout the excerpt she also referred to 'we' when talking about her planning. This is a reference to joint planning with staff from the Special Needs department. Thus, in keeping with the theme of creating new ways of working Dianne worked with and through other adults to find ways of that respecting Sean's dignity as a full member of the community of the classroom'.

Chloe teaches the composite Primary 6 and Primary 7[ii] class in a small rural primary school. In accordance with hear learning during the PGDE year, Chloe was deeply opposed to grouping children by perceived ability, and this was evident through observation of her classes. In an English Language class she began by returning the previous day's written work to children which had been peer assessed. She then asked the children to examine their own work, and to decide where they, individually, thought they needed to improve. They were offered a range of options relating to different aspects of grammar, and asked to look at the tasks and choose what they felt was most appropriate. Thus within the class, the different levels of current achievement was addressed by offering choice to the pupils, rather than the teacher making predictions about what each child may or may not be able to achieve.

When asked about her approach Chloe admitted that it went against usual practice in the school, which meant that in bringing an end to ability grouping she was challenging the assumptions of her head teacher, and the some of the prejudices held by the children after many years in ability grouped classrooms. She described the children's response to mixed grouping:

The first couple of times they were so quiet and…. they didn't like they didn't want to sit, they didn't feel comfortable sitting with people that they weren't used to working with. There was a kind of divide in the class.

Chloe took advantage of the physical separation of her classroom from the main school to continue with the approach to which she was committed, and over time managed to convince her head teacher that this was a successful approach by demonstrating improved written achievements by the children.

This example from Chloe's data demonstrates how she has accounted for diversity amongst her pupils but did not mark any pupils as different. Her practice offers a form of differentiation based on choices made by the pupils about what will help their work improve She provided an environment in which all options were available to every body, rather than having different types of task for some pupils, thereby avoiding deterministic practices She has demonstrated her active professionalism by negotiating within the school environment to be able to continue with her preferred interpretation of inclusive pedagogy, by providing evidence of successful learning, and thus has created within her classroom a space for inclusion.

5. CONCLUSION

The seven beginning teachers in this study were each working in very different settings, and grappling with a wide range of issues in the name of inclusion. It was evident that they were engaged in the 'practical theorising dialectic' identified by McIntyre (2009) whereby they drew on and assessed ideas from various sources, including their PGDE course, their professional colleagues and their own experience, to make choices about how to respond learning needs of their own particular classroom community. Hence it was very clear that rather than expecting student teachers to learn responses to all eventualities, they must be equipped instead with a set of principles from which they can draw to interpret the situations in which they find themselves and to respond in ways which align with the inclusive pedagogy.

Through the development and application of an analytical framework for inclusive pedagogy we are seeking to create a robust tool with which to examine how teachers draw from those principles in different contexts. There is currently very little guidance in the literature about how to

document and study inclusion, in the practical setting of the classroom. It is hoped that insights from this work will support teacher educators to understand the experiences of teachers who are attempting to implement policies of inclusive education in their classroom practice and to reflect on how best they can be supported by both initial teacher education and professional development activities.

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[i] Secondary 1 pupils are mostly aged between 11.5 and 12.5 at the start of the academic year

[ii] Most children in this class would have been aged 9.5 – 11.5 at the start of the academic year.