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Developing Inclusive Practice in Scotland : The National Framework for Inclusion

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Abstract

This paper reports on the collaborative development of a 'National Framework for Inclusion' under the auspices of the Scottish Teacher Education Committee by a working party representing each of the Scottish Universities providing initial teacher education. Recent research, international legislation and Scottish education policy has refocused the notion of 'special educational needs' based on ideas of individual deficit to support and provision for all learners. As teachers are therefore charged with responsibility for an increasingly diverse population of learners, the National Framework of Inclusion was developed to support both pre-service and qualified teachers to work inclusively to provide fair and meaningful experiences for all learners. The paper examines the underpinning principles of the Framework, describes the collaborative process of its development and provides one innovative example of its use.

Keywords

Inclusion; teacher education; collaboration; diversity

Introduction and Context

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) has been a milestone for the development of inclusive education across the world. This paper considers developments in one country, Scotland, to promote inclusive educational practice in schools. It describes the development and use of the revised National Framework for Inclusion, a conceptual tool produced by the Inclusion Working Group of the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC) as an example of a resource to promote and support inclusion in education (STEC 2014). Although this project emerges from a specific national context, the Framework could potentially be used in much wider contexts.

In Scotland powers relating to education are devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The principle of the Salamanca Statement that 'schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions' (UNESCO, 1994, p6) was enshrined in legislation in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, which introduced the presumption of mainstreaming, whereby the default position for all children is to be educated in their local school. This was followed by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (amended in 2009), which replaced the term 'special educational needs' with 'additional support needs' (ASN). The

term ASN goes beyond a narrow definition of special educational needs to include learners who require support for whatever reason. This might include those who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, learners for whom English is an additional language those who are looked after by the authority (Scottish Government, 2010). In addition, inclusive education in Scotland is informed and supported by the UK's Equality Act 2010, which places a duty on public bodies to have due regard to the elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to promote equity by removing barriers to participation and meeting individual needs. *Getting it Right for Every Child* (Scottish Government, 2008) and the Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 are further key drivers for inclusion in Scotland as they focus on improving outcomes for all children by placing them at the centre of the support planning process.

Of particular concern in Scottish education has been the marked socio-economic inequalities which have created an 'attainment gap' between learners from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds that is wider than in other European countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). There are ongoing efforts, evidenced by the introduction of the Education (Scotland) Bill 2015, to close this gap and to reduce inequalities of outcome by ensuring that the needs of an increasingly diverse population of learners in schools are recognised and met.

As schools are charged with teaching an increasingly diverse population of students, this raises questions about what teachers should actually do in their classrooms if they are to provide a fair and meaningful experience to all their pupils. In order to respond to the policy changes outlined above teachers must be adequately prepared and supported to work inclusively. The National Framework for Inclusion was intended to support this process.

Developing the Framework

The change in terminology enshrined in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) 2004 signalled a reconceptualisation away from the individual towards support and provision. Consequently education refocused from 'special needs' to learning for all. However, subsequent research (e.g. Pirrie et al. 2006) indicated that this transition was more complex than the simple relocation of learners previously in special schools to mainstream. Initially these concerns were raised by Sir Jackie Stewart acting as an advocate for the dyslexia community in Scotland.

The Scottish Government provided funding which allowed the Scottish Teacher Education Committee to set up a Working Group on which there were two representatives from each of the seven universities involved in initial teacher education i.e. Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Strathclyde and West of Scotland. The original remit of the Working Group was to address issues related to the learning of young people with dyslexia. The Working Group pointed out that a wealth of resources related to dyslexia (and other disabilities) already existed and that to produce more would not only be unnecessary but would also reinforce the belief that learners with different physical, cognitive or emotional needs, somehow also had different learning needs (Ainscow *et al.* 2006): a view which was currently under challenge in both academic literature and policy. Instead, the

working group suggested that the shift towards support and provision would be better served through the development of a National Framework for Inclusion complemented by a web-based resource. A framework was chosen as the Working Group felt that it allowed for the flexibility necessary for teachers and others to address the issues in their own contexts and was also broad enough to accommodate the range of views that were present within the group itself. The National Framework for Inclusion was designed to support teachers at all stages in their careers to make decisions about how to enact contemporary understandings of inclusion.

Already in Scotland the debate on inclusion had moved beyond the practicalities of mainstreaming to an understanding that all educators had to believe that every child had a right to an education and that the learning of all our children and young people was equally valued. Thus, a decision was made that the framework would be posited on values and beliefs, specifically those of Social Justice, Inclusion and Learning and Teaching Issues and how they related to Legislation and Policy.

Finally, as the Framework was intended as a document through which teacher educators, teachers and student teachers could interrogate and develop their own values, beliefs and practice the working group elected to base the Framework on the General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS's) professional standards (GTCS 2012 a, b and c). The GTCS publish a suite of standards which against which teachers are expected to examine, inform and continually develop their thinking and practice. The standards are expressed as statements which are organised as 'values and beliefs', 'professional knowledge and understanding' and 'professional skills and abilities'. The Framework explores their implications of selected standards, relating to our overarching themes of inclusion and social justice, through a series of guiding questions. As the GTCS standards were revised in 2012, the Framework for Inclusion was also recently updated. A small section of the Framework is shown, as an example of approach in Figure 1.

Fig 1 here

Principles of the revised National Framework for Inclusion

The revised Framework is based on a notion of inclusion as a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from culture, curricula and the community of mainstream schools (Ainscow *et al.* 2006). The revised edition of the Framework is underpinned by key principles emerging from recent research into Inclusive Pedagogy. The concept of 'Inclusive Pedagogy' was developed by studying the practice of primary and secondary classroom teachers who explore and think about learning and teaching in a novel way (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This approach acknowledges and responds to difficulties children face in ways which respect the dignity of each young person within the classroom community.

The National Framework for Inclusion is based on an open ended view of all children's capacity to learn. Following Hart et al. (2004), it rejects the notion that a child's ability is fixed. Instead it is informed by the belief that, through high quality teaching and learning, any child's capacity to learn can improve. This position requires teachers to move away from deterministic practices, based on the false assumption that we can predict future 'potential' from previous performance. In particular, inclusive pedagogy seeks to avoid any categorisation of learners in ways which mark them as different. This way of working seeks to avoid the damage that can be caused by practices which are intended to help, but which inadvertently exacerbate the problem by labelling and stigmatising.

Instead of addressing diversity by providing additional or different work for students who are perceived to have difficulties in learning, inclusive pedagogy asks teachers to find ways of extending what is ordinarily available to everybody in ways that include all members of their class. Where children experience difficulties, the locus of the problem is shifted from in-child factors, to the changes that could be made in the classroom, and thus learning difficulties become seen as dilemmas for the teacher rather than failures in the child. Inclusion is seen as the participation of all children in the learning community of the school and classroom (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In this way the understanding of inclusion has shifted from a focus on children's needs (or deficits) to a focus on children's rights to be acknowledged as fully participating members of the school community.

The Framework is therefore underpinned by an understanding that teachers are responsible for the learning of all pupils in their classes. This has implications for professional relationships between classroom teachers and other colleagues. Teachers are discouraged from devolving responsibility for certain children to learning support or behaviour specialists, but are instead tasked with finding new ways of working with and through other professionals, to support the learning of children without the stigmatisation that may be associated with some of the more traditional approaches to support (Spratt & Florian, 2014).

Reflections on the collaborative processes in developing the Framework

For the participants the experience of developing the framework was interesting and innovative for a number of reasons. For example, the process offers an example of peer-supported learning (Daniels et al. 2000) and collaboration that goes beyond the functional (Head 2003). First, it represented a perhaps unique instance of all teacher education faculties in one country acting together. Moreover, as indicated above, the working group comprised of two representatives from each university, one whose involvement was in curricular areas of teacher education and the other whose experiences related more to supporting learning and inclusion. Thus, the initial meeting of the working group saw a diverse range of experiences, beliefs and perspectives towards the given task expressed. Whilst the resultant process began with an exchange of information and spontaneous discussion, this in itself proved a motivating factor to explore ideas further and develop a shared understanding or common sense of the task through a collectivist approach

(Boreham et al. 2000). The difference between an exchange of information and developing a common sense highlights the difference between collaboration at a procedural or functional level and a deeper, more effective collaboration.

Deeper collaboration was afforded by the opportunities for the group to meet on several occasions, in the process of which, the group moved beyond a cognitive positioning of ideas based on individuals' everyday actions and experiences to the creation of a more affective experience and sense of interdependence as differing perspectives were appreciated and respected. Through the generation of shared understanding, what emerged was not compromise but a new common sense of inclusion and the group's task. In essence, the extended discussions led to the externalisation of perspectives, possible contradictions and potential conflicts, placing them in neutral territory, thereby creating the opportunity for creativity in managing the working group's task.

From this experience it can be argued that the value of collaboration was two-fold: first it created a context for cooperation and coordination but more significantly, it afforded the group the opportunity to go beyond these functional aspects to inhabit a space of deep collaboration and the collective generation of shared knowledge and understanding that created a common sense of the task that would not otherwise have been possible.

Using the Framework

As the Framework was developed across all seven initial teacher education (ITE) institutions in Scotland a natural starting place for its use in practice was in the various courses run in these universities. The Framework is used with pre-service and qualified teachers in a range of courses including: Masters level courses in inclusive education; undergraduate degree programmes; one year ITE programmes (PGDE) and online learning environments. It is also regularly used in professional development activities with schools. The principles and philosophy of the Framework underpin the content of these courses and professional development activity, particularly in encouraging participants to take a critical and inquiring stance.

Although the Framework is built upon the professional standards for teachers the principles and contexts of social justice and inclusion are relevant to everyone. The value of the framework lies in its actual use and in the quality of discussion which supports reflection and ultimately the development of more inclusive practice. In this respect the framework document is not prescriptive; it can be adapted to suit the needs and experiences of particular groups. It can be used by participants from a wide range of backgrounds, for example: social work and health professionals, parents, carers, support staff, instructors. The Framework is used and continues to be developed across a range of educational settings. There are examples of its application in ITE institutions, schools and in work with Local Authorities. One example described in more detail is of its use by the University of Strathclyde with Instrumental Music Services Scotland (IMS).

Working with Instrumental Music Services Scotland

IMS is a non-statutory service providing instrumental music instruction in Scottish schools. Each local education authority, of which there are 32 in Scotland, has its own IMS provision. Members of the STEC inclusion group were approached to work with IMS to support the development of inclusive practice. This request arose in response to two related events: the dissemination at an Instrumental Music Services conference of the findings of a research study which showed that there were issues related to access and participation of children with additional support needs in instrumental music lessons (Moscardini, Barron and Wilson, 2013) and a specific recommendation in a Scottish Government report which stated that Local Authorities should develop 'specialist training and continuing professional development for instrumental staff to broaden and extend provision particularly to children with additional support needs' (Scottish Government, 2013, p.18).

Initial discussion with heads of service for IMS in some local authorities suggested that it might be useful to focus on developing an understanding of inclusive practice by considering approaches that would support the inclusion of all children rather than developing a model of professional development which focussed on 'training' in particular conditions and specific aspects of additional support needs. The discussion led to a development day offered to heads of service across all 32 local authorities.

The development day was attended by Heads of Instrumental Services and instructors representing 15 Local Authorities. The group was asked to consider inclusive practice in a broad context. The concept of barriers to learning and participation was explored and questions from the Framework were used. For example the question was posed: 'Who are the learners at risk of discrimination and/or being overlooked resulting in barriers to participation and learning?' Participants were thereby encouraged to consider which children were excluded or marginalised. This required a shift in thinking about differences among learners to thinking about learning for all (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). The Heads of Service were also asked to consider how they might use and adapt the Framework for development activity across their service.

The work with IMS is ongoing. Heads of Service are beginning to develop the principles of inclusive practice in their local authorities. Some local authorities have implemented a policy change in respect of selection processes for instrumental lessons. One head of service made contact to report that selection procedures were now removed from the IMS website for his LA and the following statement was issued:

'There are no selection procedures in (the) Council. The Instrumental Music Service tries to accommodate for every child who wants to learn an instrument. Any (assessment) is to establish a starting point, not to block access.'

This demonstrates the enactment of some key principles of the Framework. It is based on an understanding that children have an open ended capacity to learn, which should not be impeded by deterministic assumptions and practices.

Furthermore, a report by the Scottish Government Music Implementation Group, evaluating the progress made in terms of the recommendations of the 2013 report (op.cit.), referred explicitly to the professional development with the heads of service and stated that '(Instrumental Music Service) guidelines reflect an updated understanding of the responsibilities of an instrumental music service as regards ASN and equity of access' (Scottish Government, 2015, p.17).

Conclusion

As described in this paper, inclusive education has come a long way since the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO 1994). Increasingly, the term 'special educational needs' came to be seen as posited on individual physical, cognitive and emotional in- and dis- abilities and, therefore, assumed deficit on the part of the individual. The development of inclusion based on all pupils' rights to be educated alongside their peers challenged this perspective. Policy developments such as the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 have been instrumental in promoting more inclusive practices in schools.

However, there is still work to be done to ensure that teaching and learning become fully inclusive. With teacher education playing a key role in preparing teachers to respond appropriately to difference and diversity in the classroom, conceptual tools such as the Framework for Inclusion can make a valuable contribution to inclusion in education by encouraging teachers to reflect on potential barriers to learning and participation, and to consider ways to overcome them. The work with the Instrumental Music Services Scotland that was discussed above shows how powerful a tool the Framework can be for teachers and teacher educators to develop their practice. The next step for the teacher educators who contributed to the development of the Framework is to explore further ways of using this tool to promote and support inclusion in schools.

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