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Politics and policies of inclusion

Introduction

Various claims are made about the success or failure of inclusion projects, for example Foucault's statement that:

Realised through technologies that make visible particular objects of scrutiny ... inclusion functions as a panoptic mechanism through techniques which allow the assignment to each individual his 'true' name, his 'true' place, his 'true' body, his 'true' disease. (1977, p. 198)

Such accounts tend to be mostly descriptive and usually take for granted that the inclusive project is a transcendental 'good', a position which has been variously contested (Clough and Clough, 2013).

Throughout this book we examine assumptions and practices which bring to life some of the conceptual foundations of inclusive theory, policy and practice in the early years, focusing specifically on the years from birth to five. Inclusion is commonly an issue of *location*, by which we mean that there remains the view that as long as children share the same space, all are included. This, of course, is not the case, and many inclusive policies and projects do not meet with success because the necessary work on understanding and meeting individual needs is missing (or inadequate).

Graham and Slee (2008) point up the conflation of inclusion not only with location, but with a hegemonic centrality. 'Existing un-named in this tokenistic play that Said (1978, p. 310) calls the "pure politics of identity"', Graham and Slee (2008, p. 286) point out, are 'the characteristics held by dominant groups, which in Australia can be said to include whiteness, ablebodiedness and so on.'

A great deal happens – or doesn't – in the name of 'inclusion'. Graham and Slee identify 'a dangerous assumption' in the way in which different presumptions to include are 'concealed by the continued use of ... generalised terms', and thus how inclusive education, which started life as a radical challenge to the traditions of schooling, becomes a means 'for explaining and protecting the status quo' (2008, p. 277). They remind us that 'to include is not necessarily to be inclusive. To shift pupils around on the educational chessboard is not in or of itself inclusive' (p. 278).

Policies can 'fail' because of 'uninterrogated normative assumptions that shape and drive policy' (Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000), which result in no more than 'tinkering at the edges' and actually leaves things much as they were. For Harwood and Rasmussen (2002, p. 5) too, there is a need to arrest 'inclusion's need to speak of and identify otherness'.

In a brief history of the education of 'exceptional children' we can see three broad periods of educational policy (during the last 100 or so years), characterised by segregation, by integration and by inclusion. Children who were considered different from the 'normal' were either isolated at home with no access to provision of care and learning or they segregated schools and institutions, according to their impairments and difficulties. The critical histories of integration policies commonly identify a generalised global movement which in the context of its early days was surely a Good Thing: it sought to dismantle a gross distinction between students' abilities and their placement in either regular/'mainstream' or 'Special' schools; it sought to abolish the categorical silos into which individuals were sorted for such locational distribution; and in its tacit recognition of the importance of environment, it called for interventions in the first instance at the curricular, rather than the individual, level (Clough, 1999). But that set of policy developments barely disturbed the status quo of discriminatory social and educational provision, for the characteristic move is essentially from outer to inner, from margin to centre, from exceptional to normal, and so on. The early years have long been at the forefront of inclusive provision of education and care, inclusion (at least in terms of location) most often being the first and default option, with exclusion (to a specialised unit, centre or school) being an option once inclusion has failed.

And so the current phase of this brief history is a properly radical one: a broadly-understood *inclusion movement* which seeks to realise a sociology that insists that it is primarily in the environment where we will discover the root cause of, and the root solution to, exclusive practices. In contrast to *integration*, the inclusion ideology looks to change not the individual – so that s/he can be 'brought in from the cold' – but, quite simply, to change the environment, the school, society, the world. ... It is no less radical a task. And in this sense it is about eradicating prejudice, injustice and inequality.

Many assumptions about what inclusion means, and looks like, go unchallenged, and make up, bind and constrain our social organisation. The task, then, is to enact inclusive policies in practice that challenge our preconceptions about human beings: children and their families, society, and success and failure themselves. If we can re-orientate our attention to the concept of inclusion (by challenging our own preconceptions), we can perhaps move from seeing inclusion as a set of practicalities to seeing it as an attitude of mind and will, for the practicalities of inclusion are merely imported remedies that 'compensate' for a 'normal' worldview. The wheelchair ramp, for example, no more spells inclusion in itself than does anything else. Without picking apart our preconceptions, enmeshed as they are with our own take on the world, we can only appeal to practicalities of adjustment which 'fit' this worldview.

What we need to do, if we are to even approximate our goal as inclusion practitioners, is to engage in a personal interrogation of our own views and prejudices around difference and difficulty.

The propensity, across various policies, to measure inclusion in quantifiable, locational terms betrays our aspiration to 'de-centralise ... normalcy'; we are just as much participants in centralised normalisation as we are critical proponents of de-centralisation. Sticking unswervingly to codified, quantitative measurements of inclusion does not necessarily equip us with the faculties of openness and critical reflection which allow us to challenge the norm of our societies.

Cultures, communities and curricula are by definition exclusive; we know things by their characteristics and by the boundaries of those features; we group things and we group people, for example, by religion, age, geography, role; we classify and we recognise what lies outside those classifications; were we unable to exclude we would be a different kind of being. Cultures, then, communities and curricula are as exclusive as they are inclusive.

Clough and Clough (2013) set out a series of simple theses which they identify as 'agnostic'. They are agnostic in the traditional sense of the term because they are properly sceptical of many current claims of the successes – and indeed 'failures' – of inclusive policies and projects. The theses are:

- Inclusion has an operational rather than conceptual focus. While we can give a dictionary definition of inclusion, what it is 'about' is such a relative, shifting, organic set of processes that any such characterisation will speak more of moral aspiration than empirics. In early education and care, we need to consider what happens in practice based on how we construct our own view of what it is to be inclusive.
- Inclusion is always in a 'state of becoming'. There can be no such thing as a fully inclusive, 'arrived-at' institution or society. In early

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education and care, practitioners, families and children are constantly working in a state of 'becoming inclusive' for new challenges and new exclusionary factors can confront settings at any point. Thus:

- Inclusion can/must only be known by its outcomes – not by its rhetoric. There is a need for evidence, and an even greater need for agreement on what counts as evidence. As a set of statements, there is little to falsify inclusion, but there is a tendency to identify (and hence to measure) it in quantifiable, locational terms. In early education and care, it is the effects of successful inclusive practices and attitudes that really make a difference. But:
- There are as many versions of inclusion as there are people to be included – and as there are people who are to include them. So in early childhood education and care all practitioners, whatever their status, need to think through their own 'take' on what it is to be inclusive and how they adopt and enact inclusive policies and practices. Inclusion is not the exclusive property of any one domain, be that political, academic, professional, cultural or otherwise, and how it is defined differs uniquely from person to person. Each version is made up uniquely of a cultural confection of experiences, beliefs, ideologies, hopes, loves, disappointments, passions, fears, of hierarchies of tolerance, thresholds to our empathies and boundaries to our sympathies. And:
- Cultures, communities and curricula are, by definition, exclusive. We know things by their characteristics and by the boundaries of those features; we group things, we classify, and we recognise what lies outside those classifications; were we unable to exclude we should cease to be (as we know it). Therefore, cultures, communities, curricula, and indeed consciousness, are all as inalienably and dialectically exclusive as they are inclusive. In early education and care, where settings work with a diverse range of children and families who represent many heritages and backgrounds, values and beliefs, the creation of inclusive curricula is a key challenge. So:
- Inclusion must not be imposed from without, but developed in partnership with those who seek it. In early education and care ongoing professional support for all practitioners to work towards their own definitions and understandings of inclusion, and to work within a set of agreed inclusive practices is essential.

Because:

- Inclusion is ultimately about how people treat each other. (Such a claim takes us back to the first statement, and thus forms an endless loop.) And this, for us, is a matter of respect, and respectful educators, in so far as they can develop their professional knowledge and practice to be so, are inclusive.

Workshop 1 Seven statements about inclusion

Think through the seven statements put forward by Clough and Clough (2013):

- 1 Inclusion has an operational rather than conceptual focus.
- 2 Inclusion is always in a 'state of becoming'.
- 3 Inclusion can/must only be known by its outcomes – not its rhetoric.
- 4 There are as many versions of inclusion as there are people to be included.
- 5 Cultures, communities and curricula are, by definition, exclusive.
- 6 Inclusion must not be imposed from without.
- 7 Inclusion is ultimately about how people treat each other.

To what extent do these apply to you? Can you use them to identify your own attitudes and responses to inclusive issues as they affect you and your own practice, the children and families you work with, and your colleagues?

Throughout this book we shall continue to discuss issues which emanate from these ideas, and to identify inclusive issues and practices as they relate to young children, their families and their practitioners. Each of the subsequent chapters of this book ends with a related workshop which can be used by staff as part of their ongoing professional development, and some direct links to policy documents of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Further reading

- Graham, L.J. and Slee, R. (2008) An illusory interiority: interrogating the discourse/s of inclusion. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(2): 277–93.
- Popkewitz, T. and Lindblad, S. (2000) Educational governance and social inclusion and exclusion: some conceptual difficulties and problematics in policy and research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(1): 5–44.