

Policy and Pedagogy for School and Social Inclusion

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Introduction

In this paper I intend to provide an outline of the policy themes of inclusion, discuss the differences between Scotland and England (as an example of significant differences within what is often, but falsely regarded as one country) and conclude with a discussion on what is being developed in Portugal and try and tease out some of the implications. I will draw on recent work that I have been involved in which took exclusion as its focus. My argument being that one can learn much about attempts to develop inclusion through failure.

Inclusive education has developed from a single-layered concept, focused on “mainstreaming” students with disabilities or “special needs” into regular schools (UNESCO 1994), to a multi-layered concept which implies developing equitable quality education systems by removing barriers to the “presence, participation and achievement of all students in education” (Ainscow 2005, p. 119).

The United Nations currently defines inclusive education as “access to and progress in high-quality education without discrimination” (UN 2016, p. 3), which requires “a process of systemic reform...to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences” (UN 2016, p. 4).

Equity and Equality

At the outset it is perhaps worth providing an analytic distinction between integration and inclusion. Both concepts draw on the notion of equity.

In the case of integration equity may be referenced to equality, and the principle may be realized through centralized and centralizing actions by agencies such as the state.

Alternatively, as in the case of inclusion, the principle of equity may be referenced to diversity, and realized in particular settings, regions and localities. This issue was explored further by Evans in the context of feminist theory.

“We might then want to see ‘equality’, ‘sameness’, and ‘difference’ as forming not a continuum, but three corners of a triangle. Then the notion of ‘equality in difference’ enters in. (This is the idea that we merit equal though not identical treatment; equal in the sense of ‘equally good, and appropriate to us’.) Though so does ‘equality through difference’, as opposed to ‘equality through sameness’ Evans, J. (1995) p. 3

The idea of an intervention being “equally good, and appropriate to us” helps us to escape the pitfalls of some post modern arguments concerning difference. This was made clear by Connolly writing from a medical perspective.

“Each child’s resources and strengths must be the deciding factors in establishing an educational programme. (rather than look for weaknesses) we would do better to look for strengths and recognise that these will be different for different children. Differences offer hope because they provide the possibility of alternative routes for development, educational and personal fulfilment. We would rejoice in them and capitalise on them. They are after all, the very stuff of life” Connolly (1993) p 942.

Inclusion in school AND social inclusion

Clark Dyson and Millward (1995) identified the following themes in the development of inclusive education: the process of change from the currently perceived exclusive to more inclusive practices; the concomitant political dimension involved in the process of change; and the nature of research and enquiry which will facilitate inclusion. As will become clear when I move to a discussion of school inclusion policy in Portugal it is important not to become too narrow in the focus of intervention. Over many years social exclusion has been defined as loss of access to the most important life chances that a modern society offers, where those chances connect individuals to the mainstream of life in that society. Bentley (2012) argued that in order to promote inclusion there is a need to “need for work on all of the varied and complex roots of social exclusion at once - in the structures of government, in systems of learning, the family social contacts and networks in the labour market, the cultures of the better off, housing and mobility, crime and the use

of personal information". Importantly this kind of argument places work on inclusion on far broader landscape than a narrow focus on classroom arrangements.

For the last 30 years there has been a great deal of research, lobbying and policy development that was intended to make the integration and support of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) more effective and build more inclusive practice in mainstream settings in the UK. Attention was directed to the development of: a cohesive multi-agency approach in assessment and subsequent formulation of provision; early intervention; better structural and organisational accountability; specialist teacher roles in each school to coordinate supportive arrangements; systems that valued parental input; and special classes and units should be attached to and function within ordinary schools where possible. Successive legislation introduced a number of regulations and rights which supported the development of these forms of practice and witnessed the shift from individual acts of integration to the development of inclusive practice. However, alongside these moves which were designed to enhance responsiveness to diversity came the introduction of policies and practices of competition between schools driven by measures of attainment.

An essential pre-requisite of inclusion is presence or access to education. Indeed, for many developing countries enabling every child to go to school is a shared international goal. UNESCO (2020) describes inclusion as "non-negotiable". While it may be argued that presence on its own does not equate to inclusion, it does provide the possibility or potential for different futures. Conversely, school exclusion is and always has been a consequence of disadvantage and it give rise to inequalities both social and economic (Daniels and Cole, 2010; Power and Taylor, 2013). It is cause for concern worldwide given that exclusion can exacerbate social fragmentation and even conflicts (UNESCO 2018).

England and Scotland

I will now turn to a discussion of some aspects of practices of inclusion and exclusion, policy and policy making in the UK.

Wide disparities exist in the rates of officially recorded 'permanent exclusions' ('removal from register' in Scotland; 'expulsions' in Northern Ireland) in the four jurisdictions of the UK. Differences also exist for recorded non-permanent exclusions, called 'fixed-period exclusions' in England, 'fixed-term exclusions' in Wales, 'temporary exclusions' in Scotland and 'suspensions' in Northern Ireland.

The latest comparable data showed that 94.7% of all pupils permanently excluded in the UK in 2016/17 were from schools in England.

Parsons (2005) has written about what he sees as a deep cultural inclination to regard punishment as the only means of responding to transgression in schools. Even a brief glance at the policy documents would appear to support this contention. In statutory guidance document has the subtitle: The Headteacher's right to exclude the first paragraph states:

'Good discipline in schools is essential to ensure that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education. The Government supports head teachers in using exclusion as a sanction where it is warranted. However, permanent exclusion should only be used as a last resort, in response to a serious breach or persistent breaches of the school's behaviour policy; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school.'

In 2010, the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) for England launched an inquiry into school exclusions under the powers of the Children Act (2004).

Illegal or hidden exclusions involve 'off the record, informal or under the radar exclusions' (OCC 2013) such as pupils being sent home on study leave, put into part-time timetables, or encouraged to change school under the threat of permanent exclusion, without formal procedures being followed (OCC 2013b). This can reduce or delay access to the support needed by the young people.

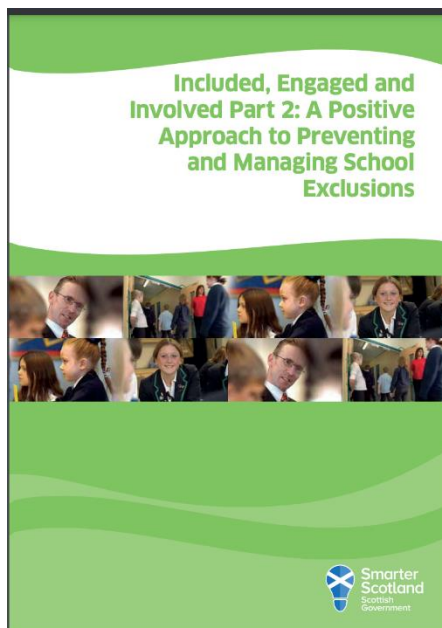
I will now compare the policy enactment practices of exclusion in England and Scotland. These two have been chosen because they embody the greatest differences in the UK.

In England education is controlled by central UK government

As far as exclusion is concerned the political mantra is that it is the Headteacher's 'right to exclude'. The focus of attention is on behaviour rather than relationships. The lack of joined-up working across government departments results in perverse incentives where different initiatives are driven by different aims and goals and are often in conflict with one another. Vulnerable young people are often recruited by organised crime and the differences between juvenile justice and education provide a good example of such perverse incentives. The lack of joined up working gives rise to a mismatch between need and provision and once placed in a category of concern it is assumed that all those placed within one category have the same needs.

By contrast the framework for policy forming in Scotland is much more inclusive and coherent. There is an umbrella body for all local authorities who work with the Scottish Government, an executive education agency (Education Scotland), a national independent professional, regulatory body for teaching (GTCS), the main teachers' unions and the main union for non-teaching staff alongside all universities offering teacher education courses. There are quarterly, in person meetings (online during pandemic) of Ministerial advisory group and a round table co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the local authorities umbrella body. This work is assisted by shortlife working groups convened on specific issues and public consultations. The civil service supports this process.

The policy discourse in Scotland is driven by the following issues: Children's rights and participation; Supporting and improving wellbeing; Positive school ethos and culture; and Building positive relationships. The policy document shown below witnesses these commitments.



Portugal

The policy environment which I have found to be most exciting is that which obtains in Portugal. Here there are three cornerstones of inclusive education: access to, participation in, and achievement in education for all children and young people (UNESCO 2017, p. 13). It is in the 'unpacking' of these concepts that the

commitment to social and educational aspects of inclusion is revealed. In this context *Access refers to far more than presence, it includes physical access but recognizes otherpotential sensory, intellectual, economic, and attitudinal barriers to education.* Similarly participation is about far more than student's frequency of attendance it may also refer to the perceptions of belonging and may thus include involvement and active engagement. *Achievement* here is concerned with far more than test performance performance and achievement on standardised national or international tests" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2017, p. 19) but also encompass the development of a "deeper understanding of the world" and of knowledge that persists after the completion of the schooling years, such as "critical thinking, collaborative skills, creativity, independence and problem solving ability" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2017, p. 19). Here is the link with the types and forms of knowledge that are valued. For Bernstein (1975) curriculum is part of the "message systems of schooling", along with pedagogy and assessment. If there are perverse incentives within and between these message systems then the development of inclusive education may become problematic.

The new policy has tried to align the "message systems" (Bernstein 1975)

The Portuguese Ministry of Education is developing indicators to monitor levels of inclusivity and success in implementing the current policy framework. The notion of what counts as success is crucial here. The imposition of an inflexible and unitary model of success would mitigate against the development of a fully inclusive system.

Additionally, the current policy framework proposes abandoning both the "special educational needs" category and the broader need to categorise a student's needs before intervening. Eliminating the conceptual use of SENs might not have the desired impact on practice, and creating a new label, "special health needs", does not seem to align with the policy discourse of removing the need to categorise to intervene. On the other hand, removing the need to categorise to intervene should be an important step towards a more inclusive system, in which the responses depend on the need for additional support.

Categories of need

We need a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which different policy configurations influence school exclusion decisions. This should provide insight into

how professional action is shaped by multiple, and often unaligned, national policy frameworks re-enacted or recontextualised in local settings and enable us to explore how 'perverse incentives' created by conflicting policy motives are resolved in practice. As is often the way in which social science is made meaningful in everyday terms, exclusions may be thought to be 'caused' by the wide variety of risk factors that are identified during the course of large scale scrutiny of existing databases. It might be more profitable to start with the position that exclusions are caused when somebody or a group decides that an individual has transgressed in such a way that the social order of an institution, or the personal sense of order held by a teacher, requires repair and maintenance actions to be taken. Ydesen and Myers (2016) define professionals as those who "draw on, manage, conquer, and shape statist capital; they do so in what can be understood as their boundary work with "the other", namely, those who fall outside the boundaries of what Shain (2013) has called "unacceptable otherness". This will also lead us to consider the cultures of tolerance which are in play at individual, classroom and institutional levels. There will be fluidity in these levels of tolerance and interrelations between them.

This position draws attention to the processes of classification as to whether or not someone has done something or been seen to do something that justifies exclusion or removal from the institution by one means or another. This would align us with a position that posits the centrality of categories to institutional ways of thinking (Douglas, 1986), organising (Bowker and Star 1999) and acting (Mehan et al 1985). If we adopt the analysis of classification of pollution and taboo developed by Mary Douglas (2003) then purity / impurity classifications are seen as a symbolic system whose primary concern is the ordering of a social hierarchy. Douglas argued that humans were classifying creatures and that human collectivities held together in a social order in part because they shared the categories that sorted their world in a common way and made it comprehensible. A focus on the active dynamic of the making of categories would place us outside the position established by Durkheim who insisted that 'the individual finds them completely formed, and he cannot evade or change them' (Durkheim 1964[1895]). Rather, as Mäkitalo & Säljö (2002:76) suggest, sense making is achieved by continuously creating the novelty of categories in relation to specific situations and local concerns. This implies that we use specific categories in institutional practices to make sense. This is part of the process of institutionalization. Sense making is not done by just identifying, and

importing, a general, pre-given meaning. General meanings are made sensible in specific settings in the actions of particular people. Thus even in high control academy chains we should be looking at processes of recontextualization of national and regional imperatives.

Makitalo and Säljö (2002) argued that an important window on the dynamic creation of social orders may be gleaned from the study of processes of categorization within which the development of linguistic categories play such an important part in the way that they mediate professional action. They suggest that once produced, categories become an important feature of the regulation of institutional activities. They argue :

that language categories are produced within collective practices to serve as mediational means (Wertsch 1991). They are also used by people as constitutive resources in such practices. Through the sedimentation of traditions of argumentation, categories have been produced to form collective ways of understanding people, actions, events, and social practices.

Institutionalization implies that categories serve as tools in the process of accounting for the relation between the collective and the individual.

Categories are manifested in the concrete infrastructure of organizations – in documents, administrative routines, databases, and other tools. In this sense, they are embedded in political, economic, social and material circumstances. (Makitalo and Säljö, 2002, p.64)

At the individual actor level these processes may well operate at a tacit or relatively unobservable or unseen level as described by Bernstein (2000) and Wertsch (2007). They are taken as the 'everyday' or 'common sense' or the 'way we do things'.

Bowker & Star (1999) argued that infrastructure is invisible when it operates smoothly, and becomes visible when it breaks down. Hence at times of threat to a social order the social categories of classification become more visible.

Categories may be seen as a form of institutional argumentation irrespective of the validity of the claims that are made about its knowledge base or status. This form of argumentation is seen as a resource that is actively used for dealing with problems within the sociocultural processes of schooling. At the same time the category and the categorisation process carries consequences for the use of resources and, worryingly, for the processes of identity formation of some young people (Hjörne and

Säljö, 2004, 2005). Hjörne (2005) showed that once a category has been created, there is a tendency to find people who fit into it, and whose identity may be shaped accordingly. As Hacking (1986: 223) puts it, there is a process by means of which people 'spontaneously come to fit their categories'. Alternatively, individuals may seek categorisation (such as low attainer) as in the case discussed by Reay and William (1999) where pupils wanted to gain low scores in their struggles with identity in competitive classroom situations.

There are three perspectives on the making of categories that may be important for such work. Firstly, as above, that of the everyday life of the school. Secondly, that of the histories of the school and those who work in it as they are brought from the past into the present (Linell 1998: 54). The traditions of the school and the past experiences of the staff may all be brought into play in the present. Makitalo and Säljö (2002) argue that it is through the analysis of categories that 'people draw on the past to make their talk relevant to the accomplishment of interaction within specific traditions of argumentation' p.75. Thirdly, that of the contestation that will arise across professions in the categorisation of what the school may count as a threat to social order. This contestation may also operate at different levels within the hierarchies of professions. For example a headteacher may wish to exclude a child and a classroom teacher or the special needs specialist may wish to seek alternatives. Policy discourse has tended to individualise reasons for exclusion rather than develop an understanding of exclusion in the wider context of education, social and health policy (Mills, Riddell and Hjörne 2014). This may well take on different forms and practices in the four jurisdictions.

What evidence do we need?

An examination of the role of evidence in developing effective inclusion must incorporate evidence on exclusion, a school practice that violates students' fundamental rights and, in turn, impacts negatively on their futures. I draw attention here to the longstanding difficulties of calibrating the extent of exclusionary practices. Absence of data results in a lack of accountability systems that serve to safeguard students. In addition to the formal systems of school suspension and expulsion are a raft of practices that indicate that the scale of exclusion is much larger. These include managed moves, off-rolling, internal exclusions, and children who effectively have part-time provision, either through restricted timetables or being sent home early. Evidence on the scale of these practices can best be described as fragile. It

appears that in England some 2% of the population are missing education, not receiving their education in a registered school. Taking both informal and formal systems together indicates a wide-spread failure of schools to provide for the diversity of students.

The relationship between policy and data collection is further witnessed in responses that target the individual rather than the system and demonstrates the pathologizing of students and their families. The formal collection of data indicate that particular groups of students are disproportionately represented but access to the data set prohibits a full public understanding of the intersection between these groups. This in turn limits our understanding of their experiences in school and the ways in which we can effectively remove barriers to participation.

A new professionalism for inclusion?

Glisson and Hemmelgarn's (1998) work exemplifies the complexities of relationships between service providers, users and the provision itself. Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) followed the progress of an initiative to improve outcomes of services for young people at risk of sexual and physical abuse through 'inter-organisational service coordination teams'. The focus of the initiative was tackling the perceived duplication of effort with a view to enhancing the quality and outcomes of services. Conversely however, the research concluded that the opposite occurred and that the approach of the initiative (referred to as a 'process-oriented' approach) actually impeded successful outcomes for children; the more visible the role of the teams, the less responsibility caseworkers took for individual children and therefore, rather than improving the quality of services, the initiative limited responsiveness to problems and reduced discrepancy.

Glisson and Hemmelgarn argue that effective outcomes for children in this case rested upon non-routine-based, individualised service decisions tailored to each young person – an approach they refer to as 'results-oriented' that allows caseworkers or teachers to respond to a child's particular needs and to be allowed to navigate bureaucratic hurdles according to the needs of the individual young person. Inclusion should be understood as being a multifaceted phenomenon or process and a complex intervention. Evidence on understanding school and social inclusion, and what might work to prevent exclusion, needs to be framed in equally complex ways that attend to both contextual and societal practice and their cultural historical origins.

This in turn requires new forms of professionalism on the part of the work force. Active link-workers, personal advisers or other forms of social pedagogy require the professional freedom to go beyond standard formulations of provision in order to make meaningful engagement with those who run the greatest risk of deep exclusion.

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