

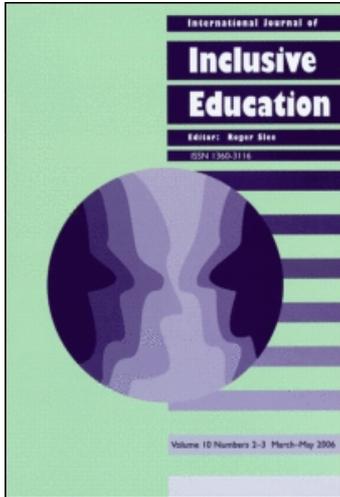
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Developing inclusive education systems: the role of organisational cultures and leadership

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Including all children in education is the major challenge facing educational systems around the world, in both developing and developed countries. Drawing on research evidence and ideas from a range of international literature, this paper argues that leadership practice is a crucial element in gearing education systems towards inclusive values and bringing about sustainable change. In so doing, the paper considers the organisational conditions that are needed in order to bring about such developments, focusing in particular on the role of leadership in fostering inclusive cultures.

Keywords: inclusive education; inclusive practice; organisational cultures; leadership, networking

Introduction

The issue of how to develop more inclusive forms of education is arguably the biggest challenge facing school systems throughout the world. In economically poorer countries the priority has to be with the millions of children who never see the inside of a classroom (Bellamy 1999). Meanwhile, in wealthier countries – despite their resources – some young people leave school with no worthwhile qualifications, whilst others are placed in various forms of special provision away from mainstream educational experiences, and some simply choose to drop out since the lessons seem irrelevant to their lives (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006).

Faced with this challenge, there is evidence of an increased interest in the idea of inclusive education. However, the field remains confused as to what actions need to be taken in order to move policy and practice in a more inclusive direction. In this paper we explore possible ways forward, drawing on international research evidence in order to determine the organisational conditions needed to foster inclusive policies and practices, and what this means for the role of leadership.

Inclusive education

In some countries, inclusive education is thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity

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amongst all learners (UNESCO 2001). The argument developed in this paper adopts this broader formulation. It presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability (Vitello and Mithaug 1998). As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. From this perspective, extending the social justice dialogue, inclusion refers to diversity as a concept, rather than reducing it to categories of differences (Fisher 2007).

More than a decade ago, the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education endorsed the idea of inclusive education (UNESCO 1994). Arguably, the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the special needs field, the Salamanca Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are:

the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

Furthermore, it suggests that such schools can:

provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (ix)

During the subsequent years, there has been substantial activity in many countries to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction (Daniels and Garner 1999; Hegarty and Alur 2002) but there is still considerable uncertainty as to how best to proceed (Mittler 2000).

In countries of the South, inclusion is often perceived of as a Western concept. However, it is increasingly being embraced on the grounds of social justice and human rights, and within the discourse of 'Education for all', with pockets of excellence emerging in different countries (Miles and Ahuja 2007). As a starting point, it is often seen as an agenda to include those groups who have been socially marginalised, for example, children who are HIV positive in parts of Africa, Dalits in the Indian Sub-continent, and the girl child in many South East Asian countries.

The confusion that exists within the field internationally arises, at least in part, from the fact that inclusion can be defined in a variety of ways (Clough and Corbett 2000; Thomas and Vaughan 2004; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). It is also important to remember that there is no one perspective on inclusion within a country, state or even a school (Booth and Ainscow 1998).

Given the confusion and uncertainties that exist as policy-makers and practitioners seek to make sense of different perspectives, advancing towards the implementation of inclusive education is far from easy. Moreover, it must not be assumed that there is full acceptance of the inclusive philosophy (Fuchs and Fuchs 1994; Brantlinger 1997). Consequently, as we consider ways of developing schools that are effective in reaching all children, it is necessary to recognise that the field itself is riddled with uncertainties, disputes and contradictions. However, what can be said is that throughout the world attempts are being made to provide more effective educational responses for all children, whatever their characteristics, and that, encouraged by the Salamanca Statement, the overall trend is towards making these responses within the context of general

educational provision (see the special edition of the *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, December 2006).

Inclusive practice

A recent study in the UK attempted to throw light on what needs to happen in order to develop inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). Its authors concluded that the development of inclusive practice is not, in the main, about adopting new technologies of the sort described in much of the existing literature (e.g. Stainback and Stainback 1990; Thousand and Villa 1991; Wang 1991; Sebba and Sachdeva 1997; Florian, Rose, and Tilstone 1998). Rather, it involves social learning processes within a given workplace that influence people's actions and, indeed, the thinking that informs these actions. This led the authors of the study to seek a deeper understanding of what these processes involve, using the ideas of Etienne Wenger (Wenger 1998). Wenger provides a framework that can be used to analyse the development of practices in social contexts. At the centre of this framework is the concept of a 'community of practice', a social group engaged in the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Practices are ways of negotiating meaning through social action. Wenger argues, for example, that a particular strategy may be developed as part of an organisation's planned activities and summarised in a set of guidance for action, providing a codified reification of intended practice. However, the meaning and practical implications of the strategy only becomes clear as it is used and discussed between colleagues. Such an analysis provides one way of describing the means by which practices develop within a school.

The implication is that a methodology for developing inclusive practices must take account of such social processes of learning that go on within particular contexts. It requires a group of stakeholders within a particular context to look for a common agenda to guide their discussions of practice and, at much the same time, a series of struggles to establish ways of working that enable them to collect and find meaning in different types of information.

Similarly important, therefore, is the development of a common language with which colleagues can talk to one another and indeed to themselves about detailed aspects of their practice (Huberman 1993; Little and McLaughlin 1993). It seems, moreover, that without such a language, teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities. It has been noted, for example, that when researchers report to teachers what has been observed during their lessons they will often express surprise (Ainscow 1999). Much of what teachers do during the intensive encounters that occur in a typical lesson is carried out at an automatic, intuitive level, involving the use of their tacit knowledge. Furthermore, there is little time to stop and think. This is perhaps why having the opportunity to see colleagues at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop practice. It is through such shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do (Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler 2002). It is also the means whereby taken-for-granted assumptions about particular groups of students can be subjected to mutual critique.

It is important to realise, however, that the introduction of such processes is not unproblematic, particularly in the context of rigid bureaucratic structures that allow less space for authentic collaboration to develop. In addition, in many developing countries, there can be issues around shortage of staff, huge class sizes, lack of support staff and additional administrative responsibilities, as well as the desire by some to

maintain a sense of superior professional expertise over others, that may act as barriers to the development of such collaborative processes (Miles and Ahuja 2007; Sandill and Ainscow 2007).

Research has drawn attention to certain ways of engaging with evidence that seem to be helpful in encouraging such social processes of learning in schools (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). Such an approach can, it is argued, help to create space for reappraisal and rethinking by interrupting existing discourses, and by focusing attention on overlooked possibilities for moving practice forward. Here, as Riehl (2000) suggests, the role of the school principal in providing leadership for such processes is crucial. Indeed, as a result of their extensive literature review, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) contend that developing people by providing intellectual stimulation is one of the core practices of effective leaders (also Harris 2002, 2006; Mulford and Silins 2003). Lambert et al. (2002) seem to be talking about a similar approach when they stress the importance of leaders gathering, generating and interpreting information within a school in order to create an 'inquiring stance'. They argue that such information causes 'disequilibrium' in thinking and, as a result, provides a challenge to existing assumptions about teaching and learning.

All of this underlines the way norms of teaching are socially negotiated within the everyday context of the communities of practice within schools (Talbert and McLaughlin 1994). In this sense, it is evidence of how the culture of the workplace affects how teachers see their work and indeed their students (Skidmore 2004). It underlines the idea that the development of more inclusive approaches does not arise from a mechanical process in which any one specific organisational restructuring, or the introduction of a particular set of techniques, generates increased levels of participation. Rather, as we have argued, the development of inclusive practices requires processes of social learning within particular organisational contexts.

Organisational factors

What, then, are the organisational conditions that can help to foster such social learning? In other words, how can schools become more inclusive? Where writers have addressed these questions, they tend to give particular emphasis to the characteristics of schools which stimulate and support processes of interrogation and reflection. For example, Skrtic (1991) argues that schools with what he calls 'adhocratic' configurations are most likely to respond to student diversity in positive and creative ways. Such schools emphasise the pooling of different professional expertise in collaborative processes. They are also places where students who cannot easily be educated within established routines are not seen as 'having problems', but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible.

Here it should be noted that 'problems' may be defined in various ways in different contexts. Therefore, for example, children seen as having behavioural difficulties, as well as underachieving pupils, and those from minority ethnic groups or gypsy backgrounds, may be the initial focus of attention. In the context of developing countries, this is likely to include a particular concern with females and children with 'lower caste' status.

Ainscow (1999) points to 'organizational conditions' – distributed leadership, high levels of staff and student involvement, joint planning, a commitment to enquiry and so on – that promote collaboration and problem-solving amongst staff, and which, he argues, produce more inclusive responses to diversity. Literature regarding

multicultural contexts also highlights similar processes of meaning making, such as openness to experiment and innovate while resolving constantly emerging issues, focusing on the needs of the individual child and giving teachers freedom to take initiatives (for example, Deering 1996; Gardiner and Enomoto 2006). However, it is important to note that within more hierarchical management structures – something that is particularly common in many countries of the South – the notion of distributed leadership is not easy to establish, neither completely understood. It also may vary in relation to the type of administrative structure that the school is working in; for example, a state run system, or a privately managed system with comparatively lesser accountability constraints, such as is found in urban contexts in India (Sandill, Ainscow, and Miles 2008). In such contexts, distributed leadership may often be equated to ‘delegated leadership’ and mostly operates through formally structured roles.

Broadly speaking, these themes are supported by a recent international literature review that examines the effectiveness of school actions in promoting inclusion (Dyson, Howes, and Roberts 2002; Dyson et al. 2004). The review concludes that there is a limited but by no means negligible body of empirical evidence about the relationship between school action and the participation of all students in the cultures, curricula and communities of their schools. In summary, it suggests the following:

- Some schools are characterised by an ‘inclusive culture’. Within such schools, there is some degree of consensus amongst adults around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all pupils access to learning opportunities. This consensus may not be total and may not necessarily remove all tensions or contradictions in practice. On the other hand, there is likely to be a high level of staff collaboration and joint problem-solving, and similar values and commitments may extend into the pupil body, and into parent and other community stakeholders in the school.
- The extent to which such ‘inclusive cultures’ lead directly and unproblematically to enhanced pupil participation is not clear. Some aspects of these cultures, however, can be seen as participatory by definition. For instance, respect for diversity from teachers may itself be understood as a form of participation by children within a school community. Moreover, schools characterised by such cultures are also likely to favour forms of organisation (such as specialist provision being made in the ordinary classroom, rather than by withdrawal) and practice (such as constructivist approaches to teaching and learning) which could be regarded as participatory by definition.
- Schools with ‘inclusive cultures’ are also likely to be characterised by the presence of leaders who are committed to inclusive values and to a leadership style which encourages a range of individuals to participate in leadership functions. Such schools are also likely to have good links with parents and with their communities.
- The local and national policy environment can act to support or to undermine the realisation of schools’ inclusive values.

On the basis of this evidence, the Dyson review team suggest that attempts to develop inclusive schools should pay attention to the development of ‘inclusive cultures’ and, particularly, to the building of some degree of consensus around inclusive values within school communities. This leads them to argue that school leaders should be

selected and trained in the light of their commitment to inclusive values and their capacity to lead in a participatory manner.

In summarising the current knowledge base on educational leadership, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) conclude that in diverse student environments, particular forms of leadership can be effective in promoting school quality, equity and social justice through more powerful forms of teaching and learning, creating strong communities of students, teachers and parents, and nurturing educational cultures among families. In her deliberations on educational leadership and diversity, Gunter (2006) presents a theoretical framework for looking at conceptualisations of diversity, value orientations that guide them and the exercise of agency that influences practice. She suggests that there is an increasing focus on ways of conceptualising human beings and their potential around capabilities within educational leadership practice, so as to assess how we connect the learning and life chances of individual students with wider social purposes in catering for the needs of a diverse population (also Rayner and Gunter 2005; Blackmore 2006). This again points to the need for explicating the values behind practices or actions taken in the day to day operation of schooling.

Such approaches are congruent with the view that inclusion is essentially about attempts to embody particular values in particular contexts (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). Unlike mechanistic views of school improvement, they acknowledge that decisions about how to improve schools always involve moral and political reasoning as well as technical considerations. Moreover, they offer specific processes through which inclusive developments might be promoted. Discussions of inclusion and exclusion can help, therefore, to make explicit the values which underlie what, how and why changes should be made in schools. Inclusive cultures, underpinned by particular organisational conditions, may make those discussions more likely to occur and more productive when they do occur. A helpful list of indicators in relation to this analysis is provided by the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2002), a framework for examining school factors that constitute barriers to learning and participation. Given the nature of open questions that the Index poses, it has found applicability in different contexts across the globe, in both developing and developed countries.

Culture and leadership

All of this underlines the importance of cultural factors. This in turn brings us back to the concerns about leadership in organisations. Schein (2004) suggests that cultures are about the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. The extent to which these values include the acceptance and celebration of difference, and a commitment to offering educational opportunities to all students, coupled with the extent to which they are shared across a school staff, relate to the extent to which students are enabled to participate (Kugelmass 2001).

Hargreaves (1995) argues that cultures can be seen as having a reality-defining function, enabling those within an institution to make sense of themselves, their actions, and their environment. A current reality-defining function of culture, he suggests, is often a problem-solving function inherited from the past. In this way, today's cultural form created to solve an emergent problem often becomes tomorrow's taken-for-granted recipe for dealing with matters shorn of their novelty.

Changing the norms that exist within a school is difficult to achieve, particularly within a context that is faced with so many competing pressures and where practitioners tend to work alone in addressing the problems they face (Fullan 1991). On the other hand, the presence of children who are not suited to the existing menu of the school can provide some encouragement to explore a more collaborative culture within which teachers support one another in experimenting with new teaching responses. In this way, problem-solving activities gradually become the reality-defining, taken-for-granted functions that are the culture of a school that is more geared to fostering inclusive ways of working.

The implication of all of this is that becoming more inclusive is a matter of thinking and talking, reviewing and refining practice, and making attempts to develop a more inclusive culture. Such a conceptualisation means that inclusion cannot be divorced from the contexts within which it is developing, nor the social relations that might sustain or limit that development (Dyson 2006). This suggests that it is in the complex interplay between individuals, and between groups and individuals, that shared beliefs and values and change exist, and that it is impossible to separate those beliefs from the relationships in which they are embodied. Nias (1989) describes a culture of collaboration developing as both the product and the cause of shared social and moral beliefs. Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) contend that in organisations striving towards change, school culture is constantly evolving. This evolution takes place through interaction of members of a school with each other and through their reflections on life and the world around them (Coleman and Earley 2005).

On similar lines, other researchers argue that in order to bring about the cultural change that inclusion demands, it is essential to consider the values underlying the intended changes (Ainscow 1999; Carrington 1999; Corbett 2001; Kugelmass 2001; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006). Thus, cultural change is directed towards a 'transformative view of inclusion, in which diversity is seen as making a positive contribution to the creation of responsive educational settings' (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson 2006, 15). This involves developing the capacity of those within schools to reveal and challenge deeply entrenched deficit views of 'difference', which define certain types of students as 'lacking something' (Trent, Artiles, and Englert 1998). Writers who are involved in facilitating and evaluating such processes in schools repeatedly identify the role of leadership as critical for sustaining such changes, both in developed and developing contexts (Lipsky and Gartner 1998; Ainscow 1999; Zollers, Ramanathan, and Yu 1999; Kugelmass and Ainscow 2003; Leo and Barton 2006).

Research in the area of inclusion indicates that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and actions are what create the contexts in which children and young people are required to learn. This being the case, the task must be to develop education systems within which teachers feel supported as well as challenged in relation to their responsibility to keep exploring more effective ways of facilitating the learning of all students. This has major implications for school organisation and leadership and for overall educational policy. It raises the question of what actions are needed to move thinking and practice forward; in other words, what are the 'levers for change'? (Ainscow 2005).

Senge (1989) sees 'levers' as actions that can be taken in order to change the behaviour of an organisation and those individuals within it. He goes on to argue that those who wish to encourage change within an organisation must be smart in determining where the high leverage lies. Too often, he suggests, approaches used to bring about large-scale changes in organisations are 'low leverage'. That is to say, they

tend to change the way things look but not the way they work. Possible examples of low leverage activity in the education field include: policy documents, conferences and in-service courses. Whilst such initiatives may make a contribution, they tend not to lead to significant changes in thinking and practice (Fullan 1991). Our aim, therefore, must be to identify what may turn out to be more subtle, less obvious and yet higher leverage efforts to bring about change in schools.

It seems, then, that the principle of inclusion is likely to require challenges to the thinking of those within a particular organisation and, inevitably, this again raises questions regarding forms of leadership. A review of literature concluded that the issue of inclusion is increasingly seen as a key challenge for educational leaders (West, Ainscow, and Nottman 2003). For example, Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) suggest that with continuing diversity, schools will need to thrive on uncertainty, have a greater capacity for collective problem-solving, and be able to respond to a wider range of learners. Sergiovanni (1992) also points to the challenge of student diversity and argues that current approaches to school leadership may well be getting in the way of improvement efforts. A particular concern highlighted in recent literature is also to understand how leadership and student behaviour are linked. Ainscow and Fox (2005) assert that forms of leadership that can facilitate improvement in student behaviour are particularly important in promoting educational inclusion.

Lambert et al. (2002) argue for constructivist leadership as a strategy for responding to learner diversity. This involves reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling. They use this perspective to argue that leadership involves an interactive process entered into by both students and teachers. Consequently, there is a need for shared leadership, with the principal seen as a leader of leaders. Hierarchical structures have to be replaced by shared responsibility in a community that becomes characterised by agreed values and hopes, such that many of the control functions associated with school leadership become less important or even counter-productive. As highlighted, this requires a cultural shift across levels and most importantly at the level of school leadership. At the same time, it is important to note that factors that influence such transitions may lie outside the school setting, for example at the district or local authority levels (Sandill and Ainscow 2007).

Much of the literature on the role of leadership in relation to school improvement places emphasis on the importance of social relationships (Hopkins 2001). Johnson and Johnson (1989), two key figures in the field of social psychology, argue that leaders may structure staff working relationships in one of three ways: competitively, individualistically, or cooperatively. Within a competitive structure, teachers work against each other to achieve a goal that only a few can attain; an individualistic structure exists when teachers work alone to accomplish goals that are unrelated to the goals of their colleagues; whereas, a cooperative structure exists when teachers coordinate their efforts to achieve joint goals. They go on to argue that to maximise the productivity of a school, principals have to: challenge the status quo of traditional competitive and individualistic approaches to teaching; inspire a clear mutual vision of what the school should and could be; empower staff through cooperative team work; lead by example, using cooperative procedures and taking risks; and encourage staff members to persist and keep striving to improve their expertise. Within this overall formulation, the authors place a strong emphasis on the need to build cooperative teams.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) refer to two approaches to school leadership, one with an orientation to student achievement and the other with a focus on meeting the needs

of individuals. They further contend that leaders serving diverse schools need to use both approaches in order to perform their role effectively (for example, West, Ainscow, and Stanford 2005; Shah 2006). Gross, Shaw, and Shapiro (2003) echo this by arguing that school leaders need to strike a continual balance between concern for people and accountability (for a discussion on teachers' response to educational change, see Hargreaves 2004). Johnston and Hayes (2007), among others, contend that student learning is linked to professional learning, and that students are likely to be more successful at school if their teachers are actively engaged in learning how to teach within the local context of the school. As a result of their research in schools in challenging circumstances, these authors assert that professional learning requires a pedagogy that disrupts the 'default modes of schooling'. Consequently, as they indicate, practitioners in schools need to 'learn new things' not only to 'do new things', conceptualising professional learning as the pedagogical practice of educational leaders.

The most helpful theoretical and empirical leads, however, are provided by Riehl (2000), who, following an extensive review of literature, develops 'a comprehensive approach to school administration and diversity'. Riehl concludes that school leaders need to attend to three broad types of task: fostering new meanings about diversity; promoting inclusive practices within schools; and building connections between schools and communities. Riehl goes on to consider how these tasks can be accomplished, exploring how the concept of practice, especially discursive practice, can contribute to a fuller understanding of the work of school principals. This analysis leads the author to offer a positive view of the potential for school principals to engage in inclusive, transformative developments. Riehl concludes:

When wedded to a relentless commitment to equity, voice, and social justice, administrators' efforts in the tasks of sensemaking, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school may indeed foster a new form of practice. (71)

The role of networking

What emerges from the evidence we have summarised is the importance of forms of leadership that encourage social learning processes within particular contexts. Such processes can, we have argued, be stimulated by inquiry which fosters a greater capacity for responding to learner diversity. Achieving a deeper and more sustainable impact on the culture of schools is, however, much more difficult. This necessitates longer-term, persistent strategies for capacity building at the school level (Harris and Chrispeels 2006). It also requires new thinking and, indeed, new relationships at the systems level. In other words, efforts to foster inclusive school development are more likely to be effective when they are part of a wider strategy (Ainscow 2005).

This has led to an increasing emphasis on the idea of sharing expertise and resources between schools, and linking educational development with wider community development. Such an approach is consistent with what Stoker (2003) calls 'public value management', with its emphasis on network governance. Stoker argues that the origins of this approach can be traced to criticisms of the current emphasis in many countries on strategies drawn from private sector experience. He goes on to suggest that the formulation of what constitutes public value can only be achieved through deliberation involving the key stakeholders and actions that depend on mixing in a reflexive manner a range of intervention options. Consequently, 'networks of deliberation and delivery' are seen as key strategies. In education services, this implies

the negotiation of new, interdependent relationships between schools, administrations and communities (Hargreaves 2003).

Within the context of educational change, Fullan (2006) proposes a new kind of leadership which goes beyond the successes of increasing student achievement and move towards leading organisations to sustainability. With this in mind, he argues for 'system thinkers in action', in which leaders widen their sphere of engagement by interacting with other schools in order to develop what he calls lateral capacity building towards sustainable development. Amidst many efforts going on in this direction, Ainscow and Fox (2005) provide an insight into lateral capacity building at the level of head teachers and schools, by developing a reflective understanding of the nature of leadership practice and moving practice forward using principles of action learning.

There is some evidence from England that school-to-school collaboration can strengthen the capacity of individual organisations to respond to learner diversity (Howes and Ainscow 2006; Ainscow and Howes 2007). Recent studies, for the most part, have focused on situations where schools have been given short-term financial incentives linked to the demonstration of collaborative planning and activity (Chapman 2005; Ainscow and West 2006; Ainscow, Muijs, and West 2006; Chapman and Allen 2006). They suggest that collaboration between schools can help to reduce the polarisation of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalised at the edges of the system and whose performance and attitudes cause concern. There is evidence, too, that when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work. Specifically, comparisons of practices can lead teachers to view underachieving students in a new light. Rather than simply presenting problems that are assumed to be insurmountable, such students may be perceived as providing feedback on existing classroom arrangements. In this way they may be seen as sources of understanding as to how these arrangements might be developed in ways that could be of benefit to all members of the class. As highlighted earlier, development of a commitment to the process is really a key issue for development and sustenance of such practices.

The idea of networking can be extended much more widely, however, in order to encourage the sharing of experiences and ideas across national borders (Miles and Ahuja 2007). It was with this possibility in mind that the Enabling Education Network (EENET) was established in 1997 with technical and financial support from a group of concerned international non-governmental organisations and UNESCO. EENET's mission is to support and promote the inclusion of marginalised groups in education worldwide (Miles 2002) by sharing information between similar contexts in Southern countries, primarily through an annual publication, 'Enabling Education' and through its website. The EENET website (<http://www.eenet.org.uk>) has over 20 000 users and almost 300 000 hits per month.

EENET shares information about inclusive education written and generated by, and for, a wide range of stakeholders, including children, parents and consumer groups, as well as policy makers, academics, teacher trainers and teachers themselves. Although the network is located at the University of Manchester, it adopts a non-academic style to ensure wide accessibility to readers who use English as an additional language. Documents posted on the website are not necessarily representative of inclusive education practice, nor are they peer-reviewed. Practitioners are simply encouraged to share their experience, their ideas and their training materials. Nevertheless, the EENET website is regarded by many as an important emerging database and a unique international resource on inclusive and enabling education.

Conclusion

As we look to the future, it is important not to underestimate the challenges facing all education systems around the world – rich and poor – as they try to respond to demands for arrangements that will provide an effective education for all children, whatever their circumstances or characteristics. In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that although 652 million children worldwide are enrolled in primary education, the out-of-school population still stands at over 100 million children, 80% of whom live in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Department for International Development (DFID) 2005). In India alone, it is estimated that at least 35 million children are not in school (DFID 2001). A report by the Chronic Poverty Research Institute (CPRI) (2005) highlights how families trapped in multidimensional poverty are excluded from educational opportunities and health facilities. Urgent economic solutions are clearly needed to eradicate poverty and ensure that all children have equal access to appropriate and affordable education.

The key challenge identified at the World Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, where progress towards Education for All was reviewed, was ‘to ensure that the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept is reflected in national government and funding agency policies’ (UNESCO 2000, para. 19). Following Dakar, a set of international development targets was developed to help governments and international development agencies to focus their efforts on eliminating poverty. These targets, collectively known as the Millennium Development Goals, provide countries with an opportunity to work together on a set of measurable objectives, the second of which is to achieve universal primary education, by ensuring that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. This is unlikely to be achieved, however, unless the necessary financial support is put in place, as asserted in the report on Global Campaign for Education (UNESCO 2005).

Providing education for the most disenfranchised and marginalised groups in the poorest countries in the world remains, therefore, an enormous challenge. Indeed, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the apparent enormity of the challenges in countries of the South and to adopt a negative deficit approach to an analysis of educational activities in such environments. Most of the literature paints a negative picture of education systems struggling to cope with poorly trained teachers, inadequate budgets, large class sizes, and more recently, the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Whilst we do not wish to romanticise resource-poor environments, we believe that education practitioners in resource-rich countries can learn some very useful lessons for their own practice if they engage with experience of efforts to promote inclusion in the South. This is why EENET tries to highlight some of these possibilities, while drawing attention to the complexities of such cross-cultural information sharing. In so doing, it sets out to show how innovative programmes in the South have a great deal to teach the economically wealthy countries of the North, where public services are increasingly faced with diminishing resources, and where access to resources is sometimes a cause of conflict. We believe that there are lessons to be learned from the experience of overcoming seemingly insurmountable resource barriers.

With this in mind, in this paper we have argued that that it is essential to be clear as to what this involves in order to bring all stakeholders together around a common sense of purpose. The approach we have outlined is not about the introduction of particular techniques or organisational arrangements. Rather it places emphasis on processes of social learning within particular contexts. The use of evidence as a

means of stimulating experimentation, and collaboration within and between schools, and between schools and the communities they serve, are seen as key strategies. As Copland (2003) suggests, inquiry can be the 'engine' to enable the distribution of leadership that is needed in order to foster participation, and the 'glue' that can bind a community together around a common purpose.

As we have argued, all of this has major implications for leadership practice at different levels within schools and education systems. In particular, it calls for efforts to encourage coordinated and sustained efforts around the idea that changing outcomes for all students is unlikely to be achieved unless there are changes in the behaviours of adults. Consequently, the starting point must be with staff members: in effect, enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increasing their sense of accountability for bringing this about. This may also involve tackling taken for granted assumptions, most often relating to expectations about certain groups of students, their capabilities and behaviours.

Our argument is, then, based on the assumption that schools and their communities know more than they use and that the logical starting point for inclusive development is with a detailed analysis of existing arrangements. This allows good practices to be identified and shared, whilst, at the same time, drawing attention to ways of working that may be creating barriers to the participation and learning of some students. However, as we have stressed, the focus must not only be on practice. It must also address and sometimes challenge the thinking behind existing ways of working.

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