Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England

Mel Ainscow , Tony Booth & Alan Dyson

Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England

Mel Ainscow[a], Tony Booth[b] and Alan Dyson[a]★

[a]*School of Education, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK;* [b]*Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK*

This paper reports on some aspects of a collaborative action research project involving teams from 25 schools in England working with researchers from three universities in an attempt to understand how schools can develop more inclusive cultures, policies and practices. Unusually in this field, the schools were not selected because of any exceptional and explicit commitment to 'inclusion'. A common process of development emerged across the schools, which started with the disturbance of existing practices and was nurtured by a range of institutional and external factors that included ideas about inclusion. The national 'standards agenda' was a major force shaping the directions taken by schools. Whilst it constrained inclusive development it also provided that development with a particular focus and led schools to consider issues that might otherwise have been overlooked. The paper concludes that inclusive developments — albeit of a highly ambiguous nature — are possible even in apparently unpromising circumstances and that there may be specific ways in which these developments can be supported. Encouraging such developments may be a necessary complement to the continued radical critique of current educational polices.

Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England

In recent years, inclusion has become a 'global agenda' (Pijl *et al.*, 1997). International organizations and national governments have committed themselves to the inclusive development of education at least at the level of rhetoric (for a recent review, see Mitchell, 2005). In England, this has taken the form of a subscription to the principles of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the promulgation of a range of guidance documents to schools (including the *Index for Inclusion* by Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Booth *et al.*, 2000), which imply not only that schools should educate increasing numbers of students with disabilities, but that they should concern themselves with increasing the participation and broad educational achievements of *all* groups of learners who have historically been marginalized. At the same time, the Government

★Corresponding author: School of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. Email d.a.dyson@man.ac.uk

in England, as in many other countries, has been pursuing a second — and arguably more powerful — agenda. This has focused on what has come to be called 'the standards agenda', an approach to educational reforms which seeks to 'drive up' standards of attainment, including workforce skill levels and ultimately national competitiveness in a globalized economy (Wolf, 2002; Lipman, 2004). The vigour with which this second agenda has been pursued has led some commentators to describe England as a 'laboratory' for educational reform (Finkelstein & Grubb, 2000).

Whilst in principle higher standards of attainment are entirely compatible with inclusive school and educational system development, the standards agenda has concentrated on a narrow view of attainment as evidenced by national literacy, numeracy and science tests. Further this agenda is intimately linked to other aspects of policy: the marketization of education; a directive relationship between government and schools that potentially bypasses the participation of teachers in their own work and disengages schools from their local communities; and a regime of target setting and inspection, creating an 'accountability culture' (O'Neill, 2002) to force up standards. It is not surprising, therefore, that many studies of the English education scene have detected significant tensions as schools attempt both to become more inclusive and to respond to these features of the standards agenda (e.g. Booth *et al.*, 1997, 1998, Rouse & Florian, 1997, Bines, 1999, Thomas & Dwyfor Davies, 1999, Thomas & Loxley, 2001, Audit Commission, 2002). Since schools are held to account for the attainments of their students and are required to make themselves attractive to families who are most able to exercise choice of school for their children, low-attaining students, students who demand high levels of attention and resource and students who are seen not to conform to school and classroom behavioural norms become unattractive to many schools. This may go some way to explaining why progress towards the inclusion of students in mainstream schools from special schools continues to be painfully slow (Norwich, 2002), why schools remain ambivalent about the desirability of the inclusion agenda (Ofsted, 2004), why levels of disciplinary exclusion remain problematic (National Statistics, 2005) and why, as the standards agenda has intensified, there is evidence of a growing 'backlash' against inclusion amongst both politicians and educationalists (Cameron, 2005; Warnock, 2005).

Unpromising as this context may seem from the point of view of inclusion, it is nonetheless, we suggest, able to add in important ways to our knowledge of inclusive developments in schools. Although we now have a substantial and growing set of accounts of schools which are seen to move in the direction of greater inclusion, the literature on such schools is skewed in particular ways. A recent review of that literature (Dyson *et al.*, 2002, 2004) concluded that the majority of accounts were uncritical and superficial and, moreover, tended to report atypical schools which were seen to be 'particularly inclusive' often in terms of a narrow meaning of inclusion as concerned with students categorized as 'having special educational needs'. The existence of such schools was commonly attributed to the impact of forceful head teachers who were able to engender a powerful commitment to inclusion and/or to the unexplained existence of an inclusively oriented 'culture' within the school. Although

more subtle and probing studies exist (e.g. Skidmore, 1999, 2004; Dyson & Millward, 2000; Benjamin, 2002), it remains true that we know relatively little about how unexceptional schools, struggling with the demands of seemingly unsympathetic policy environments, can develop inclusive cultures policies and practices. Such knowledge is important if we are to move to a position where inclusive approaches are the rule rather than the exception in national education systems. The remainder of this paper, therefore, reports a study aimed at contributing to our understanding of these issues.

Developing inclusion with schools

The study, which took place from 1999 to 2003, was called 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools' and was one of four national research networks funded as the first phase of the Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research Programme. The Network involved small teams of researchers from Manchester, Newcastle and Canterbury Christ Church Universities engaging with three local education authorities (LEAs) and groups of schools within them. The schools were invited to participate by their LEAs. Although a small number of the schools, particularly from a London Borough, saw themselves explicitly as moving towards inclusion, most did not express their orientation in these terms when they joined the project. The schools were therefore, typical of many English schools in simply wishing to 'do their best' by all of their students within the constraints of their situations.

Participating schools were invited to explore ways of developing inclusion in their own contexts in collaboration with university researchers. Rather than providing the schools with a detailed, prescriptive model of inclusion or seeking to direct their development, we suggested that inclusion might be defined in three overlapping ways: as reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students; as increasing the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of students in their local communities in ways that treat them all as of equal value; and the putting of inclusive values into action in education and society. We saw inclusive values, as elaborated by Booth (2005), as concerned with issues of equity, participation, rights, community, compassion, respect for diversity and sustainability. These three perspectives all move away from a narrow view of inclusion as concerned only with disabled students or those categorized as 'having special educational needs'. Inclusion becomes not an aspect of education or a policy or set of policies for education but a principled way of viewing the development of education and society. This was consistent with the approach in the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Booth *et al.*, 2000). Attention was also drawn to the inclusion guidance produced by Ofsted, the national schools' inspectorate, in response to the McPherson Inquiry into the police investigation into the racist murder of a Black school student (McPherson of Cluny, 1999; Ofsted, 2000).

Within this broad definition, we invited schools to review and develop their own practices. The university teams and LEA staff acted as partners to the schools as they undertook research to identify the barriers to learning and participation experienced

by their students and to find ways to reduce those barriers. We engaged with them in a process of 'critical collaborative action research' (Macpherson *et al.*, 1998). Our role was to offer schools technical and practical support in undertaking their own investigations, and to draw on our knowledge and experience of inclusion and school development to enter into dialogue about their assumptions and decision-making. Nevertheless, decisions about the direction to be taken by each school remained firmly in its own hands.

The research process varied from site to site in response to local priorities and possibilities. In most cases, the school established a small project team, including the head teacher, and identified a focus for its work. This took the form of an aspect of practice and provision that it wished to review and develop. Evidence was gathered by the schools and by the university researchers, with meetings between the two teams to exchange information and explore its implications. These processes of dialogue were extended by meetings of schools within each LEA and by four national conferences for school, LEA and university teams from across the Network.

Some cameos of school concerns

Other publications present our findings more fully than is possible here (e.g. Ainscow, 2002; Ainscow *et al.*, 2003, 2004, 2006). For the purposes of this paper, we wish to concentrate on some of the ideas we called upon to make sense of the complex ways in which schools responded to participation in the Network. However, some cameos provide a flavour of this complexity:

Cameo 1: Enhancing participation in learning.   In an urban high school, university researchers participated with a group of teachers interested in developing their approaches to teaching and learning. The initial discussions of this group gave an insight into the culture of teaching and learning in the school, and into some of the barriers to learning experienced by students. The group agreed jointly to evaluate video recordings of their lessons in order to challenge assumptions about certain groups of students, and conducted interviews with students about their experience in school. The videos encouraged reflection on thinking and practice, and the sharing of ideas about how colleagues could help one another to make their lessons more participative. For example, the recording of a modern language lesson focused the group's attention on issues of pace and support for participation, whilst discussion of the strengths of a science lesson indicated the value of students generating their own questions to deepen their understanding of subject content. In each case, it was evident that the discussions contained moments of uncertainty for other teachers who were confronted with examples of practice that challenged their own assumptions. This was potentially threatening, particularly because the staff were also involved in carrying out the requirements set by a recent inspection.

Cameo 2: Shifting assumptions.   In a primary school, students identified as having 'moderate learning difficulties' were taught separately from their peers for substantial parts of the school day in a 'resource base'. Teachers expressed the view that this was the only way to educate this group. In a series of meetings with teachers the university team raised questions about the implications of such practice for the way students were valued within the school. This provoked a debate about the inevitability of current practice, which coincided with some work by an advisory teacher on developing group work and problem-solving approaches in classrooms. At the same time as teachers began to integrate these approaches into their teaching, they also began to accept students categorized as 'having learning difficulties' into their classrooms and found, to their surprise, that the children could achieve far more than the teachers had supposed. By the end of the project, these students were spending the majority of their time in mainstream classes.

Cameo 3: Broadening horizons.   Visits between schools were part of the developmental process built into the work of the Network. Schools from two of the LEAs, where the approach to inclusion was low-key and pragmatic, were much influenced by visits hosted by a third LEA with an explicit commitment to developing inclusive cultures, policies and practices. One of the most cautious of the visiting head teachers, initially saw the host schools' commitment to inclusion as containing more rhetoric than substance and had been sceptical of the value of Network. Nonetheless, he found his own fundamental assumptions called into question. He felt that the narrow focus of the project in his own school might have been given a greater sense of direction by being viewed within the framework of a broad set of principles. He commented, 'I wonder now whether we started at the 'wrong end'? I feel we focused very much on improving learning [practice]. Maybe we should have taken a broader view like [the host authority]'.

Cameo 4: Failing to construct a dialogue.   In another of the secondary schools in the Network, with a relatively advantaged intake, teachers expressed concern about a small minority of students who did not attend regularly, or whose behaviour was seen as disruptive. Its response was to establish a Learning Support Unit (LSU) which they thought would tackle the problems presented by these students, so that teaching elsewhere could continue undisturbed. When university researchers interviewed some of these students, it became clear that they felt themselves to be alienated by the culture of the school, as evidenced in teaching approaches, relations between staff and students and what they saw as favouritism shown to students from more advantaged backgrounds. When these findings were fed back to the school team, however, the head teacher made it clear that he did not wish these issues to be pursued and that the only form of evaluation he was interested in was a quantitative analysis of reductions in absence and disciplinary exclusions from the school, both subject to government concern. He did not wish to consider the possibility that there might be limitations in dealing with disruption by seeing it as only contained within a few problematic students.

Cameo 5: Trusting in experience.   One of the primary schools felt the need to respond to the emphasis on literacy in national policy and, in particular, to the concern about standards of writing. It took the consciously bold step (especially in the context of external school inspections, a prescriptive National Literacy Strategy and the public accountability of schools for 'results') of significantly reducing the amount of time devoted to the explicit teaching of literacy skills and replacing it with group based language-development activities arising out of shared experiences. As the head explained: 'We're going down the route of looking at our teaching strategies, and how children learn, and the skills they need to learn, as learners — not the curriculum bit, but the actual learning techniques and strategies they have. Because that tends to be very limited with our children. And we actually want to broaden their range of learning strategies, their thinking skills. We want to create more opportunities of first hand experience, the discussion, practising these thinking skills'.

Making sense of developments in schools

These cameos illustrate the extent to which development in each school had its unique features. However, they also point to some common patterns which underpinned these differences:

Standards and inclusion

In broad terms, what we saw in participating schools was neither the crushing of inclusion by the standards agenda, nor the rejection of the standards agenda in favour of a radical, inclusive alternative. Certainly, many teachers were concerned about the impacts on their work of the standards agenda and some were committed to view of inclusion which they saw as standing in contradiction to it. However, in most schools the two agendas remained intertwined. On the one hand, therefore, we were often aware of the ways in which the standards agenda narrowed and subverted the schools' commitment to inclusion. Invited to develop inclusive practices, for instance, many schools (like those in cameos 1, 2 and 5) focused immediately on questions of attainment, seeing such a focus as *the* way to be concerned about the achievement of students. Similarly, the school in cameo 4 saw its Learning Support Unit as *the* way of maintaining problematic students in the school. Potentially more inclusive approaches were, in these contexts, commonly passed over.

   On the other hand, the focus on attainment in these schools evidently prompted teachers to examine issues in relation to the achievements and participation of hitherto marginalized groups that they had previously overlooked. Likewise, the concern with inclusion tended to shape the way the school responded to the imperative to raise standards. This was particularly evident when, towards the end of the Network's life, we asked teachers from schools in the three LEAs to consider what outcomes their work had generated for students. Although they saw themselves as producing the 'observables' of raised attainment, improved attendance and so on, they did not find that this was possible simply through officially sanctioned practice,

such as the national Numeracy and Literacy Strategies. Many of the children they taught did not, they argued, learn effectively from such practices. Through the Network and its associated research and development processes, they had attempted to make sense of why this was and to explore different kinds of practice that might be more successful. They felt, they told us, that they had had to develop the responsiveness of their schools to the characteristics of these students in ways which promoted students' engagement with learning and their sense of themselves as learners. While these actions would eventually be reflected in the measures for which they were held accountable by government, such holistic developments were, they suggested, valuable 'for [their] own sake', not simply as a means to an end.

There was, therefore, a mutual colonization of the standards and inclusion agendas in schools' work. If the former in many ways constrained and subverted the latter, there were also ways in which it was itself shaped by inclusive values and offered a focus for the realization of those values in practice.

Communities of practice

In trying to make sense of the relationship between these external imperatives and the processes of change in schools, we were struck by a strong sense in each of the schools of 'the way we do things here'. We observed the possibilities for change emerging from the hours of formal as well as informal discussions and sharing of experiences over hurriedly taken lunches. One teacher, for instance, described the way she hoped to adopt and share a new set of practices:

> Hopefully I'll be able to use … a lot of these ideas really, and see them working. And then hopefully, other people on the staff as well will be able to see them working, and I'll get to say to them, 'try doing this — it does work'. Not, 'try doing this — I've read it in a book' so to speak. Because we can all read things in a book and think, oh well, it will work there, or work there, but it won't work here. Well if we can get it to work here, that proves that it does work, people are more willing to take on board ideas I think, when they've seen evidence that it's been working.

To understand this sense of 'the way we do things here', we found it helpful to draw upon the idea of 'communities of practice', as developed by Wenger (1998). Wenger gives a particular meaning to practice in this context, in terms of those things that individuals within a community do to further a set of shared goals, drawing on available resources. This includes not only the engagement with their formal tasks but how they make it through the day, commiserating about the pressures and constraints within which they have to operate. Such communities develop group loyalties, concerns about accountability to each other and value the views and resources developed by the group more than those presented by 'outsiders'. Staff teams in our study can be seen as communities of practice, intimately bound up with their own particular norms, values, beliefs and assumptions. As Wenger put it:

> Communities of practice are not intrinsically beneficial or harmful. … Yet they are a force to be reckoned with, for better or for worse. As a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relationships, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities

> hold the key to real transformation — the kind that has real effect on people's lives. … The influence of other forces (e.g. the control of an institution or the authority of an individual) are no less important, but … they are mediated by the communities in which their meanings are negotiated in practice.
>
> (Wenger, 1998, p. 85)

This 'negotiation of meaning' is, we suggest, precisely what we saw as schools in our study made their own sense of the tensions and contradictions between the standards and inclusion agendas. It explains, amongst other things, why they did not simply submit to the imperatives of the former. It also explains how they could and did change. Communities of practice are stable only to an extent. Because they are engaged continually in the joint construction of meaning, established meanings — and hence established understandings and practices — can be called into question. New imperatives, new circumstances, new community members and new views from established members constantly enter into this exchange. We see in cameo 3, for instance, how something as apparently straightforward as a visit to an LEA where things are done differently can provoke a significant rethinking of 'the way we do things here'. On the other hand, change does not follow immediately upon each and every external intervention, whether from national policies or from the sorts of dialogues in which we were engaged with the schools. Nor is there any guarantee that change will be in an inclusive direction. The closing down of negotiation that took place in the school in cameo 4 is an example of this. The question for us, therefore, is why change occurs in some cases but not others and how and why that change can become inclusive.

Change and development

We found two sources of ideas helpful in attempting to understand this question. These were Argyris & Schön's (1978, 1996) distinction between single and double-loop learning, and Skrtic's (1991a, b, 1995) distinction between bureaucracies and adhocracies, together with his notion of the recognition of 'anomalies' as the catalyst for the transition from one to the other. Argyris and Schön describe the way that organizations 'learn', to different extents and levels. 'Single-loop learning' involves improvements to existing practice without any fundamental reconsideration of the assumptions on which that practice is based. 'Double-loop learning' involves responding to questions about the underlying aims of practice and the implicit theories which underpin it. Skrtic, who is specifically concerned with how schools respond to student diversity, also proposes a fundamental distinction in the way organizations solve problems. He argues that bureaucratic organizations deal with problems by creating different sub-units and specialisms to contain them whilst practice elsewhere in the organization remains undisturbed. However, 'adhocratic' organizations see such problems as an opportunity to rethink their existing practices in fundamental ways. Skrtic argues that bureaucratic organizations can become adhocratic if enough of their members recognize 'anomalies' in existing practice.

 Both of these accounts, therefore, make a distinction between processes which allow 'the way we do things here' to be maintained and those which call for a reorientation

which, in Wenger's terms, require new meanings to be negotiated. Both accounts, moreover, see the key factor which differentiates these processes as being the recognition of some 'anomaly' which disturbs and cannot be accommodated within existing frames of reference. We would argue that we witnessed the appearance of many such disturbances — the visit to the 'inclusive' LEA in cameo 3, the close examination of classroom practice in cameo 1, the intervention of the advisory teacher and the raising of questions about the role of the 'unit' in cameo 2, for instance. In each of these cases, there was sufficient disturbance of existing frames of reference for established practices to be problematized and, ultimately, changed. Insofar as those established practices were less inclusive than the new ones which replaced them, the process of disturbance offers a mechanism whereby schools can develop in more inclusive directions.

However, it is also clear that different schools respond to disturbances in different ways. The school in cameo 4, for instance, responded to the presence of students who were not accommodated within existing practices and to our challenges about the nature of those practices in a way that we saw as limiting its learning. As Skrtic predicts, it created a sub-unit to deal with its problem so that established practice could continue undisturbed. By contrast, the school in cameo 5 faced a situation common to many primary schools at the time — the pressure to follow the requirements of the National Literacy Strategy as the means to increase student attainments. While many schools responded to this situation instrumentally (Tymms, 2004; Statistics Commission, 2005), this school recognized an anomaly which problematized its existing practice and led to significant changes in that practice. The implication of these two cases would seem to be that anomalies do not simply *present* themselves, but have to be *recognized* as such.

One factor which differentiates these schools' response to anomalies is the attitude of the two headteachers — one willing to open questions up, one seeking to close them down. We might see the former as a manifestation of what Lambert et al (1995) call 'constructivist' leadership which can engage colleagues in what we have earlier characterized as shared meaning-making. We were also able to identify other factors which support the recognition of anomalies. The exploration of evidence and alternative perspectives arising from different assumptions was particularly important. These included our encouragement to schools to reflect on evidence which they had asked us to collect, as well as our attempts to construct dialogues and the part played by visits between schools and LEAs in the Network. Particularly powerful in stimulating a rethinking of practice was the work of the advisory teacher, mentioned in cameo 2, who took over teachers' classes and involved them in group-work, thinking-skills and problem-solving activities. The impact was, in the words of one teacher, 'revolutionary in school'. Another teacher explained why:

> I also think that all the alternative things, all the things that she's given me, are — any teacher could execute. But, I think they need to see you do it. You see it's all right her giving us the book of alternative forms of recording, but like a lot of teachers, if she'd just given me it and I hadn't had knowledge of what she meant, I might have thought 'oh yes very good', and pushed it in a drawer and never picked it up again. I think you actually need to see her doing it with the children.

Here again we are in the territory of communities of practice, where processes of meaning-making in a particular community and in the local context of that community are at work; 'what we see working here' is more important than what others tell us to do. However, in this case, established patterns of practice and meaning are disturbed sufficiently for distinctly new patterns to begin to emerge.

Development and inclusive development

We believe, therefore, that we can explain how and why some of the participating schools engaged in the sorts of more fundamental rethinking characterized by 'development' and why some did not. However, this still does not explain why development should be in a more inclusive direction. Why, in other words, should schools not respond to anomalies by rethinking their understandings and reconstituting their practices in less rather than more inclusive ways?

The answer to this question clearly lies partly in the attitudes and values of those who make up the community/ies of practice in the school and, in particular, of those head teachers who can exercise positional power and other forms of influence on those attitudes and values. In this respect it may be seen as encouraging that, when the rather aggressive standards-based policies are mediated by those communities of practice, the outcomes often have distinctly inclusive components. However, it seems to us that it is not necessary to rely entirely on the appearance of inclusively oriented communities of practice in schools. Instead, there is something in the business of teaching, in these schools at least, which exerts a pull — albeit one that is easily counteracted — in an inclusive direction.

It is perhaps so obvious that it is easy to overlook the fact that the sorts of disturbances which are evident in the cameos set out above and, indeed, in all of our work with participating schools, arose frequently from what we might call a 'lack of fit' between the established practices of the school and the characteristics and responses of the school's students. In each case, what concerned teachers was that some or all of their students were not responding to those practices — in particular, that they were not learning or behaving — in the way that they wished. In some cases, this was a negative realization in the sense that attainments were low (as in cameo 5) or behaviour was unacceptable to teachers (as in cameo 4). In other cases, the realization was more positive, as in cameo 1, where the teachers realized that their students had more potential for learning than they had previously acknowledged. Teaching, it would seem, involves repeated encounters with student diversity and whilst the option of constraining that diversity to fit established routines is ever-present, there is always the potential for that diversity to create disturbances within those routines.

This brings us back to the intertwining of the standards and inclusion agendas. We noted above that the focus on attainment may cause schools to identify issues that were previously overlooked. More specifically, our cameos indicate that the standards agenda directs schools to look carefully at the impact of their practices on students. Certainly, the gaze which is required is a narrow one, concerned almost exclusively with whether or not students are acquiring tightly defined skills and items of

knowledge. Nonetheless, we see (for instance in cameo 1) how the question of whether students are achieving in this narrow sense can lead on to further questions of why they fail to learn and how they might learn. In other words, it opens up the possibility of a fuller engagement with the actual, diverse characteristics of those students and to this extent can be co-opted to support an inclusive orientation.

Some implications for the development of inclusion

This paper has suggested that a study located in the English context might increase one's understanding of how non-exceptional schools working in an unpromising policy environment develop — or fail to develop — inclusive practices. We have argued that, in fact, the relationship between the standards and inclusion agendas as they intersect in schools is not the sort of simple opposition that some other studies might lead us to expect. Such external agendas are mediated by the norms and values of the communities of practice within schools and they therefore become part of a dialogue whose outcomes can be more rather than less inclusive. We have further suggested that the process of meaning-making within communities of practice is dynamic. Change is always possible and we have outlined some of the circumstances under which change is more likely to become development and development is more likely to become inclusive.

Our argument has drawn upon established theoretical perspectives. However, we think that these perspectives have something to offer to those concerned with the development of inclusion in schools. We noted above how the existing literature focuses on atypical 'inclusive schools' with exceptional leaders standing out against the generality of non-inclusive approaches. We might add that other parts of the inclusion literature — including some of our own work (Booth, 1995; Booth *et al.*, 1998; Dyson & Millward, 2000) — have been engaged in what Corbett & Slee (2000) characterize as 'cultural vigilantism', in the sense of a constant scrutiny of policy and practice to identify and expose any compromise of inclusive principles. We continue to believe that both these kinds of study are important to the further development of inclusion in education. However, our work suggests that the possibilities for inclusive development are inherent in all schools and are realized in often quite unexceptional and unpromising circumstances. We make no claims, of course, that the developments in our schools were anything other than deeply ambiguous. However, their example suggests that some more widespread move in an inclusive direction is possible and that such a move might result from supporting the incremental development of schools rather than from a radical transformation of understandings and practices.

Moreover, the role of national policy emerges from our study in something of a new light. From the ground-breaking work of Fulcher (1989) onwards, there has been a powerful tradition in the inclusion literature of scepticism about the capacity of policy to create inclusive systems, either because the policy itself is ambiguous and contradictory, or because it is 'captured' by non-inclusive interests as it interacts with the system as a whole. Certainly, some of our own work can be located within this critical tradition (Booth, 1996; Booth *et al.*, 1997; Dyson & Slee, 2001; Dyson, 2005). However, what our study shows is the way in which schools can engage with

unfavourable policy imperatives to produce outcomes that are by no means inevitably non-inclusive. Moreover, current English education policy seems to contain at least some elements that promote these outcomes, both in its own somewhat equivocal commitment to inclusion and in those aspects of the standards agenda which focus attention on hitherto marginalized learners. It is, therefore, possible to imagine how strengthening and extending these elements might support further inclusive developments in schools.

The ideas that more inclusive approaches can emerge out of internal school dynamics and that it is possible to intervene in these dynamics opens up new possibilities for national policy. The marketization of education is expanding in influence around the world. A radical shift in national policies, however desirable, is unlikely until, perhaps, the contradictions become even more evident between market-driven ideologies and the desire of large sections of the population for an equitable high quality education in decent neighbourhoods for all children. We suggest, therefore, that the efforts of those concerned to put inclusive values into action cannot be directed only at the radical critique of educational polices, important as such critiques will continue to be. Rather, we must also concentrate on trying to expand the inclusive aspects of current policy and support teachers to take greater control over their own development. In reframing ideas about achievements so that they are underpinned by inclusive values we can get past the unhelpful idea that notions of standards, broadly defined and re-appropriated, and inclusion are in opposition to each other. We suggest that such measured attempts to take control of a 'comprehensive' agenda for the development of participation and learning in schools continues to offer hope of moving beyond the emergence of a few exceptional schools towards the gradual building of a school system that is more genuinely and sustainably inclusive.

Acknowledgements

References

Ainscow, M. (2002) Using research to encourage the development of inclusive practices, in: P. Farrell & M. Ainscow (Eds), *Making special education inclusive* (London, Fulton).

Ainscow, M., Booth, T. & Dyson, A. (2004) Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: a collaborative action research network, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 8(2), 125–139.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T. & Dyson, A. (2006) *Improving schools, developing inclusion* (London, Routledge) (in press).

Ainscow, M., Howes, A. J., Farrell, P. & Frankham, J. (2003) Making sense of the development of inclusive practices, *European Journal of Special Needs Education,* 18(2), 227–242.

Argyris, C. & Schön, D. A. (1978) *Organizational learning* (Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley).

Argyris, C. & Schön, D. A. (1996) *Organizational learning II: Theory, method and practice* (Reading, MA, Addison-Wesley).

Audit Commission (2002) *Special educational needs: a mainstream issue* (London, Audit Commission).

Benjamin, S. (2002) *The micropolitics of inclusive education: an ethnography* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Bines, H. (1999) Inclusive standards? Current developments in policy for special educational needs in England and Wales, *Oxford Review of Education,* 26(1), 21–31.

Booth, T. (1995) Mapping inclusion and exclusion: concepts for all ?, in: C. Clark, A. Dyson & A. Millward (Eds), *Towards inclusive schools?* (London, David Fulton).

Booth, T. (1996) A perspective on inclusion from England, *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 26(1), 87–99.

Booth, T. (2005) Keeping the future alive: putting inclusive values into action, *Forum for Promoting 3–19 Comprehensive Education,* 47(2+3), 151–158.

Booth, T. & Ainscow, M. (2002) *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools* (2nd edn) (Bristol, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education).

Booth, T., Ainscow, M., Black-Hawkins, K., Vaughan, M. & Shaw, L. (2000) *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools* (Bristol, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education).

Booth, T., Ainscow, M. & Dyson, A. (1997) Understanding inclusion and exclusion in the English competitive education system, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 1(4), 337–354.

Booth, T., Ainscow, M. & Dyson, A. (1998) England: inclusion and exclusion in a competitive system, in: T. Booth & M. Ainscow (Eds), *From them to us: an international study of inclusion in education* (London, Routledge).

Cameron, D. (2005) Speech to the Oxford Conference in Education, 2 August 2005 (David Cameron. Available online at: http://www.davidcameronmp.com/articles/viewnews.php?id= abf255ae1514859dd9a97c69dda1a35e (accessed on 3 August 2005).

Corbett, J. & Slee, R. (2000) An international conversation on inclusive education, in: F. Armstrong, D. Armstrong & L. Barton (Eds), *Inclusive education: policy contexts and comparative perspectives* (London, David Fulton).

Dyson, A. (2005) Philosophy, politics and economics? The story of inclusive education in England, in: D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Contextualising inclusive education: evaluating old and new international perspectives* (London, Routledge).

Dyson, A. & Millward, A. (2000) *Schools and special needs: issues of innovation and inclusion* (London, Paul Chapman).

Dyson, A. & Slee, R. (2001) Special needs education from Warnock to Salamanca: the triumph of liberalism, in: J. Furlong & R. Phillips (Eds), *Education, reform and the state: twenty-five years of politics, policy and practice* (London, RoutledgeFalmer).

Dyson, A., Howes, A. & Roberts, B. (2002) A systematic review of the effectiveness of school-level actions for promoting participation by all students (EPPI-Centre Review, version 1.1), in: *Research evidence in education library* (London, EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education).

Dyson, A., Howes, A. & Roberts, B. (2004) What do we really know about inclusive schools? A systematic review of the research evidence, in: D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Special educational needs and inclusive education: major themes in education* (London, RoutledgeFalmer).

Finkelstein, N. D. & Grubb, W. N. (2000) Making sense of education and training markets: lessons from England, *American Educational Research Journal,* 37(3), 601–631.

Fulcher, G. (1989) *Disabling policies? A comparative approach to education policy and disability* (Lewes, Falmer).

Lambert, L., Walker, D., Zimmerman, D. P., Cooper, J. E., Lambert, M. D., Gardner, M. E. & Ford Slack, P. J. (1995) *The Constructivist Leader* (New York, Teachers College Press).

Lipman, P. (2004) *High stakes education* (London, RoutledgeFalmer).

Macpherson, I., Aspland, T., Elliott, B., Proudford, C., Shaw, L. & Thurlow, G. (1998) A journey into learning partnership: a university and state system working together for curriculum change, in: B. Atweh, S. Kemmis & P. Weeks (Eds), *Action research in practice* (London, Routledge).

McPherson of Cluny, Sir W. (Chair) (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.* Cm 4262-I (London, Stationery Office).

Mitchell, D. (Ed.) (2005) *Contextualising inclusive education: evaluating old and new international perspectives* (London, Routledge).

National Statistics (2005) *Permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools and exclusion appeals in England, 2003/04* (London, DfES).

Norwich, B. (2002) *LEA inclusion trends in England 1997–2001, statistics on special school placements and pupils with statements in special schools* (Bristol, CSIE).

O'Neill, O. (2002) Called to account. Lecture 3, Reith Lectures 2002 (London, BBC). Available online at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lecture3.shtml (accessed on 20 September 2005).

Ofsted (2000) *Evaluating educational inclusion* (London, Ofsted).

Ofsted (2004) *Special educational needs and disability: towards inclusive schools* (London, Ofsted).

Pijl, S. J., Meijer, C. J. W. & Hegarty, S. (Eds) (1997) *Inclusive education: a global agenda* (London, Routledge).

Rouse, M. & Florian, L. (1997) Inclusive education in the market-place, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 1(4), 323–336.

Skidmore, D. (1999) Discourses of learning difficulty and the conditions of school development, *Educational Review,* 51(1), 17–28.

Skidmore, D. (2004) *Inclusion: the dynamic of school development* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Skrtic, T. M. (1991a) *Behind special education: a critical analysis of professional culture and school organization* (Denver, CO, Love).

Skrtic, T. M. (1991b) The special education paradox: equity as the way to excellence, *Harvard Educational Review,* 61(2), 148–206.

Skrtic, T. M. (Ed.) (1995) *Disability and democracy: reconstructing (special) education for postmodernity* (New York, NY, Teachers College Press).

Statistics Commission (2005) *Measuring standards in English primary schools.* Report No. 23 (London, Statistics Commission).

Thomas, G. & Dwyfor Davies, J. (1999) England and Wales: competition and control — or stake-holding and inclusion, in: H. Daniels & P. Garner (Eds), *World yearbook of education 1999: inclusive education* (London, Kogan Page).

Thomas, G. & Loxley, A. (2001) *Deconstructing special education and constructing inclusion* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Tymms, P. (2004) Are standards rising in English primary schools?, *British Educational Research Journal,* 30(4), 477–494.

UNESCO (1994) *Final Report: World conference on special needs education: access and quality* (Paris, UNESCO).

Warnock, M. (2005) *Special educational needs: a new look* (London, Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain).

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Wolf, A. (2002) *Does education matter? Myths about education and economic growth* (London, Penguin).