

Chapter two

Theoretical framework for an inclusive approach

In the previous chapter the authors explored concepts of inclusive education. They concluded that valuing difference and the concepts of social justice and equity were fundamental to an understanding of inclusive education.

In this chapter the authors present a theoretical framework for an inclusive approach to education, which practitioners can use as they make pedagogical decisions.

Some argue that there is a 'need to stop trying to define and recreate a polished version of inclusion' (Ekins, 2017, p. 135), and the authors recognise the dynamic nature of the concept of inclusion. However, in order for practitioners to develop their practice in an inclusive way, a framework within which to consider practice is needed. The authors will, therefore, provide a working definition of inclusive education and discuss the implications of the definition for practice in schools and in particular supporting children and young people with SEN.



Theoretical framework for an inclusive approach, presented within six dimensions

The authors' theoretical framework for an inclusive approach to education is presented within six dimensions:

- Learning and difference
- Social justice and human rights
- Empowerment
- Creativity
- Humanism
- Praxis

These six dimensions are explained and explored in the following sections.

Learning and difference

As pedagogues, our key concern is learning. Whilst it may be problematic and raise conflicts when measures of successful learning and the arenas in which learning occurs are discussed, it is not controversial to state that learning is about change. Learning moves us as humans from one position to another, to a different place. Learning is about exploring and understanding different approaches, positions and outcomes from different perspectives.

These perspectives can be more diverse when the diversity of learners and teachers are widened and, as such, pedagogues need to value difference in order to enhance learning opportunities. When curricula welcome and value difference, learning can be enhanced. Whether we believe learning is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1986) and situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991), experiential (Dewey, 1958; Kolb, 1984) and discovery-based (Bruner, 1966) or even based within direct instruction (Clark, Kirchner and Sweller, 2012), bringing diverse learners and teachers will offer enhanced learning opportunities. This welcoming and valuing of difference will also have the impact of emancipating those who have been disabled by society, by removing stigma and discrimination (Mazurek and Winzer, 2015).

Learning is about change and difference. As professionals concerned with learning, valuing difference is at the core of our practice.

Social justice and human rights

Notions of inclusive practice have a theoretical basis within the belief in fundamental human rights. The notion of 'equity' is founded upon the belief, as expressed in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that, 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (United Nations, 1948). This right is linked to education in Article 26.

A social justice approach is based upon the belief that there are fundamental human rights. One of these is the right to education.

'Everyone has the right to education' (United Nations, 1948). Article 22 (United Nations, 1948) presents the statement that everyone is a member of society and that the elements of society should promote human rights, dignity and 'free development of his personality'. This article links human rights to social justice, indicating that society should be actively promoting human rights and, therefore, justice. Schools, as significant institutions in societies, therefore have a key role in securing human rights and delivering social justice. Article 26 further states that education, 'shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace' (United Nations, 1948).

Empowerment

In order to provide all members of society with education which is appropriate to their diverse needs and interests, all of their voices need to be heard and their views need to be represented in decisions. School structures and mechanisms continue to reflect both dominant ideologies (Illich, 1973) and specific attitudes towards learning. A parallel with attitudes to disability in society can be drawn. 'Disabled people, like children, are meant to be seen and not heard: they are meant to be grateful, not angry, they are meant to be humble, not proud' (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 67). In school settings, this attitude to disability, or diversity, can be seen as being compounded because the learners are also children or young people. By listening and involving diverse children and young people in making decisions about their education, they will be empowered directly. This empowerment will also have implications beyond school settings, as this validation of their views and importance is likely to strengthen and affirm their identity in society.

Diverse members of communities need to be enabled and empowered to have their voices heard and views represented. By engaging all people in planning and decision-making about their education, curricula will move towards inclusivity.

This approach of empowerment links closely to the theory, critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has the aim to 'build more egalitarian power relations, to strengthen the voices of learners, and to inspire critical consciousness, in order to promote social change' (Cho, 2013,

p. 1). This theory can be contextualised when viewed in the context of wider critical theory approaches, which focus on the power which exists within societal structures as a result of historical events. The critical theory view is well summarised in an educational context by Smith (2012, p. 131): 'We should ask if we want educational systems to perpetuate social and economic inequalities. It is possible for schools to engender understanding and tolerance, include all children and enable them to learn together. Today education segregates and divides.'

By empowering those who have been disenfranchised as a result of societal structures and attitudes, we can open new avenues and potentials for learning, as expressed by the phrase from critical pedagogy: the 'language of possibility' (Giroux, 1997).

Creativity

When we accept that learning is about change and difference, creativity becomes a key aspect to inclusive education. The drive of creativity is well defined as the desire to 'add variation and diversity to society and culture, rather than mimic other's successes or otherwise support the status quo' (Moran, Copley and Kaufman, 2014, p. 281). If we understand that creativity in education is not, necessarily, about 'creative' subjects, such as art or drama, but about 'originality, novelty or newness' (Gajda, Karwowski and Beghetto, 2017, p. 272), then valuing diversity can be regarded as part of the creative process or creative flow encompassing the expansive tendency of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 11). The importance of creativity within the context of inclusive education is that the focus is towards a wide range of outcomes for learning activities. This contrasts with curricula and assessments where narrow, tick-list outcomes define success. When visiting early years and primary settings during the December term, the author was often surprised to be shown 'creative' outcomes drying on a line and see 30, almost identical, festive cards. In this case, when an inclusive and creative approach was taken, one would expect to see 30 very different cards waiting to go home. Where we recognise and value the diverse experiences and backgrounds of learners it is necessary to provide space for different outcomes.

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Humanism

Humanism is a philosophical concept which puts humans at the centre of existence. It believes that there are core, positive traits which humans live by and also links closely to the belief that there are human rights. It contrasts philosophical arguments which espouse ideas about universal truths and instead maintains a focus on views which are concerned with the ethics of human existence.

Making ethical and reasoned decisions based on evidence and with concern for other human beings.

The roots of humanism are suggested to have arisen as part of the Renaissance in sixteenth-century Italy as a reaction to restrictive totalitarian and dogmatic religious power (Russell, 1989) and later developing in response to the rise of fascism (Davies, 2008).

Whilst there continue to be debates about the definition of humanism, the key elements of this concept are that the core to being human is bound within moral values where humanity stands in opposition to barbarity and inhumanity and makes ethical decisions based on scientific reasoning. The psychologist Carl Rogers, used the base of humanism to focus on the importance of relationships in human development. This notion of positive psychological relationships underpinning successful learning and resulting in motivated, independent learners (Rogers, 1967) is a key element to a humanist dimension.

Praxis

Praxis (Freire, 1996) is a term which encompasses the use of theory to improve practice with a values-based goal in mind. Praxis in inclusive educational approaches means using research evidence to improve learning in practice within a specific ideological framework, or values-based evidence informed practice.

Using evidence informed practice to improve learning for all.

Where education practitioners engage with research evidence, both reading and conducting their own, practice can be significantly improved. In order to ensure that the evidence supports inclusive educational approaches, it needs to be approached in a critical way.

Critical realism (Cruickshank, 2003) can offer practitioners a useful lens through which to consider the evidence and help practitioners make informed choices. Rather than viewing evidence as providing a complete truth which when followed results in specific outcomes, this lens supports the consideration of evidence as presenting descriptions of causal relationships. These causal relationships can be considered by practitioners and their relevance and applicability to their own settings and contexts can be considered. Critical realism is also a values-based theoretical approach, recognising that science, or research, embodies particular values (Bhaskar, 1989). As such this approach fits well with the other dimensions presented here.

Implications

The implications upon practice of adopting an inclusive approach, based on the six dimensions, will be explored in later sections of this book. It may, however, be useful to consider here the implications for practitioners. In adopting a change in practice towards an inclusive approach, it is likely that there will be implications and change which are widespread for the practitioner, reaching beyond the boundaries of their professional interactions with learners.

[T]he world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

Eleanor Roosevelt, Chair of the United Nations Commission that wrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948

Changes in the language which practitioners use can often be a significant factor. The use of specific language will be discussed in later chapters, however it is important to recognise how the language we use carries implications for social and cultural values (Holmes and Wilson, 2017) and how frequently the language we use can have a negative impact on different learners. A consequence of this for practitioners is that they can feel that they become very self-conscious about all the language they use and that they need to develop new habits in their word choice.

Adopting an inclusive approach is closely linked to challenging the status quo and is a political decision, as part of 'liberation politics' (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 53). Practitioners will find themselves challenging systems, structures and practice where exclusionary practices continue (Ruairc, 2013) and this will lead towards political discussions. The tensions for educators between their role and expressing political views has long been recognised. In a recent revision to government advice, a warning about expressing political views was issued (DfE, 2018, p. 25). This tension is something which practitioners may find challenging and will need to reflect upon.

A further likely impact of adopting an inclusive approach is that the practitioner may experience a challenge to their professional power. The empowerment of those previously marginalised (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 64) is likely to introduce a new balance in professional relationships which can challenge the practitioner's established relationships.

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.

(Lovecraft, 1927)

It is important to acknowledge that the challenges which moving towards an inclusive approach can present are likely to be scary for the practitioner. They will be moving into a new and unknown professional and personal arena. This can be an emotionally challenging journey and these factors could easily prevent the practitioner from making changes to their practice.

It is by remembering the ethical, or moral, imperative to provide access to education for all and by considering their own support networks and not making these changes alone that a practitioner can successfully take forward the principles of an inclusive approach to education, using the framework suggested, and make a positive change for the learners they encounter.

Inclusive education entails reaching out to all learners and addressing all forms of exclusion and inequalities in access, school participation, and learning outcomes. Effective models for inclusion can help children with disabilities flourish and ultimately play an important and active role in society. Inclusive education is also beneficial for all learners with its focus on diversity and quality and its responsiveness to the different needs of children.

(Unesco/IIEP, 2018)

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