Achievement and Inclusion in Schools and Classrooms: Participation and Pedagogy


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This paper discusses the nature of educational achievement and inclusion and considers what methodological approaches might support an examination of the relationship between them. It reports on our continuing research, which addresses three contemporary concerns: the concept of achievement, meanings of inclusion, and the use of evidence to inform educational policies and practices. The relationship between inclusion and achievement is important because some schools continue to resist becoming more inclusive on the grounds that that doing so will have a negative effect on the academic achievement of other students and will lower overall standards (Audit Commission, 2002). Furthermore, research on inclusion and achievement that has an over-reliance on some types of quantitative evidence, for example those provided by large-scale national data sets, may restrict the outcomes of that research, because the analysis of such evidence may promote a narrower view of both achievement and inclusion.

That is, achievement may be reduced to performance scores in core curriculum subjects, thus disregarding achievements relating to others areas of the curriculum and aspects of children’s lives. Similarly, inclusion may be restricted to focusing on the perceived learning difficulties of a small number of individual children, rather than looking more broadly at the contexts in which all teaching and learning takes place. Therefore the emphasis must be on gathering evidence which is appropriate to the research focus and useful to the researcher (Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse: 2007).

The primary purpose of this paper is to report on a project that we have recently completed, and with a particular emphasis on aspects of the methodological approach we used. However, we conclude our writing by discussing ways in which this work has contributed to our current research, not only in term of developing our understanding of its substantive concerns but also methodologically. The focus of our earlier research was to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between achievement and inclusion in schools (see for example, Rouse and Florian, 2006; Florian, Rouse, Black-Hawkins and Jull, 2004; Black-Hawkins, et al: 2007). Building on these findings and other related work we are now examining the nature of that relationship in terms of teaching and learning in classrooms (see also Florian, 2007, Florian and Kershner, 2008; Rouse, 2008). Of course, schools and classrooms are not experienced separately in the lives of children or teachers, and we acknowledge their inherent connectedness. However, in our current research we are specifically exploring the nature of teaching and learning approaches and strategies which are effective in supporting the achievement of all children, including those who are designated as having special educational or additional support needs.

It is important to bear in mind that the school level research we report on here was based in England, whereas our current work is taking place in Scotland. The reasons for this geographical shift are partly pragmatic (new academic posts in a Scottish university for two of us) but also because it has allowed us to explore some differences and similarities between two national education systems, and the possible effects of these on the development of inclusive classroom pedagogies. It is too early for us to speculate on their significance,
although variations that we are interested in pursuing include differing national curriculum arrangements, school inspection procedures, and processes for pupil assessment. Readers will also note some differences in the terminology used: for example, ‘additional support needs’ (Scotland) and its nearest equivalent ‘special educational needs’ (England). To avoid confusion and repetition we have generally used English terms when specifically discussing our earlier work and Scottish terms for our current research.

We begin the paper by examining some of the background to our research generally on the relationship between educational achievement and inclusion. We go on to describe our earlier project and, in particular, the Framework for Participation: the methodological tool we developed to support the collection of detailed contextual evidence across case studies of four schools. We then provide a brief discussion of the key findings from this research. In the final part of the paper we reflect on the ways in which we are building on this work, both methodologically as well as in terms of its findings, so as to support our interest in inclusive classroom pedagogies that support the achievement of all pupils.

Background to our research on achievement and inclusion

Understandings of educational inclusion and achievement are partly shaped by shifting social, economic and political circumstances, whether local, national or global in nature. In England and Scotland, as elsewhere, politicians have been increasingly concerned about the costs and outcomes of the education system in terms of its contribution to the nation’s economic wealth and well-being. Although governments in different countries have responded in a variety of ways to these pressures, the major structural reforms that took place at the end of the twentieth century shared certain characteristics. These emphasised the principles of competition and choice, which together were intended to raise the academic standards of individual students, schools and nations. Mechanisms of accountability have also been an essential component of this ‘marketisation of education’ (Power and Whitty, 1999). In England, for example, these include the measuring of children’s academic performance, at ages seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen, through standard tests and the publication of the results in performance tables. Alongside these reforms another rather different set of large scale educational developments have taken place in many countries. That is, even whilst national governments have maintained this emphasis on competition, choice, accountability and standards, they have also been enacting policies to promote more inclusive educational systems. Tensions have then emerged as a result of conflicts between principles that, on the one hand, underpin market based reforms and, on the other hand, are based on values of equity and social justice (Rouse and Florian, 1997).

Improving both inclusion and achievement are, clearly, worthwhile and important educational aims and this dual focus on the most vulnerable students and on all students is a welcome development (Florian, 2007). However, a lack of clarity about meanings can make it difficult for teachers to know how best to proceed in developing policies and practices that will encourage schools to be both highly inclusive in their student intake whilst supporting the highest achievements from all their students. Furthermore, such policies generally present a particular and somewhat narrow interpretation of both concepts. That is, inclusion is taken to mean the process of increasing the numbers of students attending mainstream schools who, in the past, would have been prevented from doing so because of their identified special educational, or additional support, needs. Meanwhile, achievement is usually seen in terms only of raising academic standards as measured by national tests and examinations, rather than more broadly in terms of social, emotional, creative and physical achievements.
Researching achievement and inclusion in schools: introducing the project

In this research we explored the tensions in the relationship between achievement and inclusion in schools and considered how they might be resolved. We examined the concept of inclusion: how it is understood by practitioners working in schools and also how it is presented in government documents and in recent research. In so doing we considered a number of associated ideas such as exclusion, integration, special educational needs, difficulties in learning and disability as well as broader notions of social and economic inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, we examined the concept of achievement and its meanings, as well as the related notions of academic standards, progress and performance, plus broader understandings of educational achievement.

Currently, in England, the government’s core policy for services for children and young people is ‘Every Child Matters’. In this ‘enjoying and achieving’ is identified as one of five major outcomes that are key to ‘well-being in children and in later life’ (DfES, 2004). Similarly, the notion of achievement (and also inclusion) is embedded in ‘Getting It Right for Every Child’: the recent core policy for services for children and young people in Scotland. This outlines a ‘vision for children’ in which they ‘need to be safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, respected, responsible and included’ (Scottish Executive, 2006: 4, our emphasis). Both policy initiatives, however, require careful consideration of the purposes of schools more generally and our aspirations for what children should achieve (and enjoy achieving) during eleven or so years of compulsory education and beyond. Skills in literacy and numeracy are undoubtedly important, but so too are other achievements which may be more intangible but not necessarily less valuable; these might include, for example, developing self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience, social skills, creativity, tolerance and empathy.

Three overarching questions shaped the research. These were: (i) What is the relationship between achievement and inclusion? (ii) How might a school’s policies and practices raise the achievement and inclusion of all its students? (iii) What strategies might help teachers to understand, monitor and develop all students’ achievement and inclusion? Thus our focus was not on existing and generalised inequities in current national systems but on the ways in which individual schools set out to accommodate variations amongst all their learners so that all can achieve, whether or not they have been identified as having disabilities, learning difficulties or special educational needs. We also set out to explore how different conceptual understandings of inclusion and achievement produce different methodological approaches to their measurement, assessment and monitoring in schools and how these in turn help to determine what counts as evidence. In line with these arguments, the research used both quantitative and qualitative data to support a multi-site case study analysis of two primary and two secondary schools, all situated in the same urban area. First, we drew on evidence from large-scale national data sets and second, we developed the Framework for Participation, as a tool to collect detailed evidence to explore the relationship between inclusion and achievement in the four schools and as a structure to present and discuss our findings.

When selecting the schools we used two criteria: that they enrolled a diverse student population from their local communities, and also that they were clearly seeking to develop the achievement of all their students within the context of maintaining a highly inclusive student intake. We visited the schools over the course of about six months, spending the equivalent of approximately eight days in each. During that time we observed staff, students and other members of the schools’ communities at work and play: in classrooms, staffrooms, playgrounds, corridors, meetings, assemblies and canteens. We interviewed a range of staff as well as talked more informally to children and other adults. We also collected documents
relating to policies and practices in each of the schools. Decisions about who to interview, who/what to observe and which documents to collect were guided by the Framework, whilst taking into account the circumstances of individual schools.

The key purpose of the case studies was to examine the complex relationship between students’ inclusion and achievement through stories about real schools. Whilst all four schools shared the characteristics noted in the previous paragraph, the policies and practices which they had developed to support the inclusion and achievement of their students varied tremendously across and within each of the schools. Therefore, another important purpose of the case studies was to illustrate the wide range of approaches that different practitioners had adopted as they sought to understand, monitor and develop their students’ achievement and inclusion. Each school had particular priorities, challenges and resources and the case studies set out to reveal and celebrate this variability, rather than search for commonalities. As Stake (2006: 40) explains: ‘Comprehension of the phenomenon […] requires knowing not only how it works or does not work in general, independent of local conditions, but how it works under various local conditions’. Looking across four schools offered the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of the complex phenomena of educational achievement and inclusion, and the relationship between them, as experienced by students and staff.

**Researching achievement and inclusion in schools: the Framework for Participation**

The Framework for Participation is the research tool, or methodological lens, through which our four case studies of schools were constructed. The Framework helped to shape our decisions about interviews (who to interview, what to ask), observations (who to see, where, what to record), documentary/archival sources (what to collect) and statistical data (what to use). It allowed us to scrutinise the policies, practices and everyday interactions that contribute to the life of the four schools, and, in doing so, to explore key themes and concerns regarding the relationship between achievement and inclusion. In particular, we wanted to examine how related concepts (‘special educational needs’, ‘learning difficulties’, ‘disabilities’, ‘standards’, ‘attainment’, ‘progress’, ‘aptitudes’ and so forth) were understood and used by a range of members within the schools and the consequences of those different meanings and applications. Thus we were interested in members’ underlying beliefs about notions such as ‘same’ and ‘different’, ‘normal’ and ‘other’ (Florian, 2007).

The Framework also supported our research intention to consider how these issues interacted at different levels within and across the four schools: that is, to understand the educational experiences not only of an individual child or young person but also a particular group of students or class, as well as across whole schools and beyond, taking into account local and national influences and concerns. Thus, the Framework takes account of the participation of all members of a school, including students, teachers, support staff and parents/carers. It sets out to understand why one school may be more successful than another, often similar school, at supporting both the inclusion and achievement of its members. It is also concerned with exploring the underlying values and beliefs embedded in the cultures of schools and identifying existing and potential strategies to raise achievement and inclusion and, thereby, to enable schools, in different ways, to become increasingly participatory. (For further background to the development of the Framework, see Black-Hawkins, 2002).

**What is Participation?**

We have used the term ‘participation’ as a way of bringing together, understanding and re-defining, the relationship between inclusion and achievement. Seven key principles, as
summarised in Table 1, underpin the Framework: however, the following definition by Booth offers a most useful starting point.

Participation in education involves going beyond access. It implies learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared lessons. It involves active engagement with what is learnt and taught, and having a say in how education is experienced. But participation also involves being recognised for oneself and being accepted for oneself. I participate with you, when you recognise me as a person like yourself, and accept me for who I am (Booth, 2002: 2).

That is, if a school’s community aims to support its students (and staff as well) to participate in these ways, then opportunities must be provided for everyone to be included and to achieve. The strength of the connection between these two concepts is paramount. Thus the inclusion of a child in a school has little meaning unless s/he also experiences achievement, and that child is unlikely to achieve unless they are included, which in turn necessitates their full participation.

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<th>Table 1: What is participation?</th>
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<td>Participation…</td>
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<td>(i) Impacts upon all members of a school and all aspects of school life.</td>
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(i) **Impacts upon all members of a school and all aspects of school life:** Participation, because it concerns both achievement and inclusion, necessarily relates to the experiences of all members of a school: staff and parents/carers, as well as students. It does not therefore only apply to a specific group, or groups, of students categorised as having ‘special educational needs’. Indeed, using this term to describe students may act as a barrier to their participation (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, 2000). Similarly, participation is also concerned with all aspects of the life of a school and not just the teaching and learning which occur in classrooms, although this too is important. It relates to a school’s formal policies and practices as well as the countless everyday interactions that take place amongst its members.

(ii) **Comprises two interconnected and never-ending processes:** To make sense of participation it is necessary to understand its close relationship to barriers to participation: increasing participation reduces barriers to participation and vice versa. However, these processes are not always easy to identify. They can be complex, ambiguous and opaque. Activities in a school may increase participation for some whilst reinforcing barriers to participation for others. These interconnected and never-ending processes are constantly shifting and may be difficult to change (Ballard, 1995). Whilst there can be no such institution as a ‘fully participatory’ one, it is an aspiration well worth pursuing.

(iii) **Is concerned with responses to diversity:** Participation is concerned with responses to diversity within a school. These include understandings of, and attitudes towards, ethnicity (e.g. Riehl, 2000; Blair and Bourne, 1998); gender (e.g. Riddell, 1992; Siraj-Blatchford, 1993; Blyth and Milner, 1997; Reay, 2003; Warrington and Younger, 2006); class (Gazeley, and
Dunne, 2005; Reay, 2006) disability (e.g. Oliver, 1990; Thomas, Walker and Webb, 1998) and ability (Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre, 2004). As demonstrated in all these texts, discrimination is often subtle and complex, sometimes unintended, and rarely straightforward; see, for example, Gillborn and Youdell (2000) exploration of the interplay between poverty, class, ethnicity and gender in the educational experiences of students. However, the devaluation of any member of a school, for whatever reasons, forms a barrier to their participation. This is not to suggest that all students receive identical learning experiences but rather that their diversity is recognised and used ‘as a rich resource to support the learning of all’ (Booth, et al, 2000: 12).

(iv) Is distanced conceptually from notions of ‘special educational needs’: However well we define a word, the ways in which it is understood by others is also partly determined by how they choose to use it themselves. This is not just a matter of word play. The concept of inclusion continues to be shaped by past interpretations and in particular their association with the notion of the physical presence and absence of students in mainstream schools. Even in some texts which set out to argue for a wider whole-school interpretation of inclusion, there remains an enduring focus on specific groups of students who are considered to have learning difficulties (Sebba, 1997; Thomas et al, 1998; Corbett, 1999). The concept of participation does not carry this burden of the past and in particular it is distanced from the notion of ‘special educational needs’. Although participation is, rightly, concerned with physical access to and within schools, this is only one aspect of a much broader understanding of schools and education, which encompasses all students and staff engaging in activities inside and outside classrooms.

(v) Requires learning to be active and collaborative for all: Participation requires the active and collaborative learning of students, in which they make choices about what they learn as well as how they work together to support each other’s learning; that is, being ‘actively involved’ (Hopkins and Black-Hawkins, 1997). This is not, therefore, about ‘special’ provision for ‘special’ students who are considered to have learning difficulties. To paraphrase the title of Hart’s (1996) book, it is about the enhancement of all students’ learning ‘through innovative thinking’, and using available resources, including students and other staff, in creative ways. This understanding of participatory learning can also be extended to include members of staff participating in active and collaborative learning with their colleagues and therefore working towards what Southworth (1994) termed, over a decade ago, a ‘learning school’. The contribution of all teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as students and parents/carers, should be recognised and differences acknowledged, encouraged and welcomed because they provide a range of experiences, understanding and interests that make up the membership of a school.

(vi) Necessitates the active right of members to ‘join in’: Inclusion may suggest a passivity on the part of members of a school, whereas participation stresses the notion of actively ‘joining in’. With the former, therefore, there is a sense of the conditional: members are allowed, even if perhaps encouraged, by others to be included. With the latter, participation is a right that is shared by all. However, this in turn also implies reciprocal responsibilities. That is, there is a right and a responsibility to participate in learning alongside and with others, as well as a right and a responsibility to participate in decision-making processes; see also Macmurray (1950) in (vii) below.

(vii) Based on relationships of mutual recognition and acceptance: There are useful parallels between the concept of participation and Fielding’s understanding of the nature of ‘schools as communities’ (1998; 1999) and ‘person-centred’ schools (2000). In both the quality of
relationships between members of a school is paramount. Fielding draws on the work of the philosopher Macmurray who argued that relationships should be based on the two fundamental principles of freedom and equality.

If we do not treat one another as equals, we exclude freedom from the relationship. Freedom too, conditions equality. For if there is restraint between us there is fear; and to counter the fear we must seek control over its object, and attempt to subordinate the other person to our own power. Any attempt to achieve freedom without equality, or to achieve equality without freedom, must, therefore be self-defeating. (Macmurray, 1950: 74)

This emphasis on ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ also relates to the rights and responsibilities noted in (vi) above. That is, members have the right to be themselves whilst accepting the responsibility for valuing other members as their equals. Macmurray (1938), however, does not define equality in terms of assimilation, stating: ‘It is precisely the recognition of difference and variety amongst individuals that gives meaning to the assertion of equality’ (p.4). All relationships in schools require recognition and acceptance: those between students and staff as well as those amongst students and amongst staff. And, they are enacted not only through policies and practices, but also in the countless informal personal interactions that take place amongst students and staff in any school.

What are the purposes of the Framework for Participation?

The key purposes of the Framework have already been mentioned in the introduction to this section and a summary of them is provided here. The Framework for Participation sets out:

(i) To examine the participation of all members of a school: students, teaching and non-teaching staff and parents/carers.
(ii) To explore the complexities of the educational experiences of individual and groups of children and young people and staff, as well as across whole classes, schools and beyond.
(iii) To address why some schools are more successful than other similar schools at supporting both the inclusion and achievement of students and staff.
(iv) To scrutinise a school’s policies and practices and everyday interactions so as to reveal the underlying values and beliefs embedded in its cultures.
(v) To identify existing and potential strategies which are effective in raising achievement and inclusion, as well as those which may reduce barriers to achievement and inclusion.

Not only are all five purposes closely connected but they can lead to what appears to be contradictory findings. That is, certain policies or practices may promote greater participation for some members of a school whilst at the same time reinforce barriers to participation for others. Indeed, the impact of some policies and practices even on individual members may be ambivalent. One commonplace example we identified in our case studies was the practice of withdrawing students with low literacy levels from mainstream lessons so as to provide small group intensive teaching in reading and writing. Such provision arguably both supported and impeded their participation. On the one hand, improved literacy competence would allow such students greater access to the curriculum in the future, on the other hand, withdrawal excluded them from the current learning experiences of their peers in mainstream classes. Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) describe this as the ‘commonality-difference dilemma’ (p.171). They argue that if staff respond to students’ diversity they ‘ipso facto
create different forms of provision for different students and thus become less than fully inclusive’. Yet, if staff ignore students’ diversity they may exclude them from participation by ‘offering them experiences from which they [are] alienated’ (p.172). The intention of the Framework is not to smooth away these everyday complexities, but to provide a means by which they can be more clearly understood. In our schools, it was perhaps the values and beliefs which underlay the decisions behind policies and practices that required our careful consideration.

How is the Framework for Participation structured?

The Framework is divided into three main sections as shown in Table 2. These provide the overall structure by which the principal elements of participation can be considered. Each section relates to an aspect of what it means to participate, or not to participate, fully in the life of a school.

Table 2: Sections of the Framework for Participation

| (i) | Participation and ACCESS: being there |
| (ii) | Participation and COLLABORATION: learning together |
| (iii) | Participation and DIVERSITY: recognition and acceptance |

The next stage of the Framework is shown in Table 3. Here each of the three main sections is expanded to include a number of related elements, accompanied by a series of questions, to help determine decisions about what evidence to collect, from whom and how. In many ways it is the ‘why’ questions in Table 3 that are most pertinent in understanding participation, for in addressing these, the reasons and purposes underlying ‘who’ and ‘what’ are more easily revealed. To make sense of ‘why’ necessitates an exploration of the underlying values and beliefs which shape the cultures and thus the policies and practices and everyday interactions of a school. Such scrutiny may, at times, prove to be a difficult and challenging task, but without doing so, efforts to become more participatory may be superficial.

Table 3: Elements and Questions of the Framework for Participation

| (i) Participation and ACCESS: being there |
| - Joining the school |
| - Staying in the school |
| - Access to spaces and places |
| - Access to the curriculum |
| • Who is given access and by whom? Who is denied access and by whom? |
| • What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote access? What are the policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to access? |
| • Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school is greater access afforded to some individuals/groups? And, why is access withheld from some individuals/groups? |

| (ii) Participation and COLLABORATION: learning together |
| - Learning alongside other students |
| - Supporting students to learn together |
| - Members of staff working together |
| - Staff and students learning together |
| - Schools and other institutions working together |
| • Who learns together? Who does not learn together? |
What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote collaboration? What are the policies, practices and interactions that reinforce barriers to collaboration?

Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school do some individuals/groups learn together? And, why are there barriers to some individuals/groups learning together?

(iii) Participation and DIVERSITY: recognition and acceptance
- Recognition and acceptance of students, by staff
- Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff
- Recognition and acceptance of students, by students

Who is recognised and accepted as a person and by whom? Who is not recognised and accepted as a person and by whom?

What are the policies, practices and interactions that promote recognition and acceptance? What are the policies, practices and interactions that form barriers to recognition and acceptance?

Why within the cultures (values and beliefs) of the school are some individuals/groups recognised and accepted? And, why are there barriers to the recognition and acceptance of some individuals/groups?

As we observed in the case study schools, the three main sections that structure the Framework are, of course, not experienced by staff and students as discrete entities. Therefore decisions about where to include specific aspects of participation were not always straightforward. ‘Participation and diversity’, in particular, permeated all policies and practices in the four schools. For example, decisions about ‘access’ and admissions were partly based on understandings of and attitudes towards student diversity. Similarly, successful ‘participation and collaboration’ was, to some extent, dependent upon members acknowledging that the range of experiences and expertise amongst them was a resource that may enrich the learning of students and staff, rather than simply a problem to be overcome.

And, of the three main sections that of ‘participation and diversity’ was also the most problematic in terms of identifying processes of and barriers to participation. This was not only to do with its pervasiveness, but also because the values and beliefs which underpin relationships between members of any school were often unquestioned by staff and students alike.

Information about the kinds of research evidence that we collected and methods we used whilst working in the four case study schools is provided in the Appendix. This summarises the use of interviews, observations and school documents in relationship to the Framework’s three sections, their main elements and associated questions. It is not intended to be a definitive list: there are other methods which other researchers may wish to include. That is, the Framework is intended to be used flexibly: as a starting point, to suit a range of concerns, interests and resources. However, all of the sources suggested are readily available in schools and thus also support practitioners who wish engage in research activities. So, practitioners might take one part of the Framework to form a small-scale study in their own schools, in which evidence is collected in a highly focused way and/or built up over an extended period of time. For example, they might chose to investigate ‘creating and maintaining a welcoming and safe school’ (as part of ‘access to spaces and places’) and, in addition to the suggestions given in the Appendix, they might then ask students to photograph or film those places and spaces in their school where they do, and do not, feel safe.

Furthermore, the Framework does not specify precisely how interviews, say, should be undertaken, or precisely which aspects of school life might be observed, as this will be
dependent on other research considerations. Nevertheless, our experiences of using the Framework suggest that asking members of a school to provide narrative accounts can be particularly revealing of underlying values and beliefs; for example, a teacher telling a story about why a child has been excluded, or a teaching assistant describing a lesson in which s/he worked really well with a teacher, or a student relating how s/he spends their lunchtimes. Similarly, our experiences of observations indicate that not only lessons, but also staffrooms, assemblies, playgrounds, canteens and staff meetings can provide real opportunities to explore how far policies are put into practice, as well as the nature of the relationships between members of a school.

Researching achievement and inclusion in schools: discussing the findings

Understanding the relationship between inclusion and achievement is of importance to educationalists for a number of reasons, many of which are at the heart of concerns about where and how children and young people should be educated. These include: the pressures on schools brought about by increased accountability; the justification for allocating additional resources to groups of students; the introduction of national strategies to improve teaching and learning more generally; the development of evidence based practice; unease about the morale of teachers and the motivation of students. Furthermore, these concerns come at a time when advances in technology have increased researchers’ abilities to handle large amounts of data, thus making it possible to frame questions that could not have been answered in the past. However, we would argue, from our own research, that although large-scale national data sets may offer some insights into the relationship between achievement and inclusion they also have significant limitations not least because of their reliance on performance scores as a measure of achievement, and on the numbers of individual children identified as having special educational needs as a measure of inclusion. In research commissioned by the DfES, Dyson, et al. (2004) looked at the academic performance of schools in England, in terms of national test results, through the then recently compiled National Pupil Database (NPD). Their intention was to examine whether school performance was affected, either positively or negatively, by the proportion of students identified as having special educational needs on the roll of each school. However, their findings indicated that generally there is little or no relationship between inclusion and achievement when measured in this way. Furthermore, they argued that: ‘There may be something to learn from schools which manage to reconcile high levels of inclusivity with high levels of attainment’ (ibid.: p.49).

Devising and using the Framework for Participation provided the necessary structure to allow us to examine four such schools and then, through the multi-site case study analysis (Stake, 2006), to deepen our insights into the relationship between achievement and inclusion more generally. Whilst doing so enabled us to reveal differences and similarities between the schools, we were most particularly concerned with understanding why these were so. Therefore, we were guided by Gould’s (1996) insight that trends (in this case towards greater inclusion) are about changes in variation within complete systems, rather than a single entity or process moving directionally. Our aim was to learn from the four schools in ways which might then be helpful to those who work in and with other schools. A summary of our key findings is provided below (for greater detail see Black-Hawkins, et al., 2007).

Mediating tensions of excellence-equity

In England, as elsewhere, a problem facing those committed to developing more inclusive schools has been how to mediate the tension between demands for excellence in academic
achievements with the principle of equity. To be equitable, however, does not require a denial of difference. There is no doubt that there are differences between learners. The key questions are, as Minow (1990) has asked: what counts as difference? and what difference does difference make? A fundamental question arising from this apparent tension between equity and excellence is: how can a school become both equitable for diverse groups of learners (that is, inclusive because they accommodate difference) as well as be excellent for all (that is, demonstrate achievement gains for all children and young people)? Each of the four schools we studied were undoubtedly highly inclusive in terms of their student populations; they all had open admissions policies, and children and young people who, in other local authorities might well have been placed in special schools or units, were welcomed onto their rolls. At the same time three of the schools were high achieving in terms of students’ measurable progress in national assessment tests and examinations.

Our evidence indicates, therefore, that whilst schools are affected by marketplace educational reforms, and particularly in England their relative position in local performance tables, this does not necessarily lead to them resisting pressures to become more inclusive. Staff in schools which include a diverse student population seem able to maintain a strong commitment to values of equity and social justice, whilst developing policies and practices intended to raise all students’ achievements. Indeed, being inclusive in this way can bring benefits to a wide range of students, and not only those identified as having special educational needs. Such attitudes and understandings may well be most prevalent in LAs which have specifically encouraged mainstream schools to take responsibility for all students. However, even in these circumstances other somewhat more ambiguous beliefs and attitudes were revealed. So whilst staff articulated the view that all children and young people were of equal worth and had the right to attend their schools, some also argued that a very small number of students might achieve more if they were taught in specialist settings. The arguments given were not that such children were not welcomed in their schools but, for their own sakes, they should go where they would benefit from better resources and greater staff expertise.

Staff as creative professionals working in dynamic problem solving organisations

The four schools had developed ways to mediate these tensions produced by the clash of conflicting philosophies that underpin inclusion and marketplace reform. Furthermore, and quite properly, each used a range of different approaches because they necessarily aimed to respond to their particular circumstances and the needs of their particular students. Our evidence from across the case studies, therefore, suggests that schools which aim to be increasingly supportive of the inclusion and the achievements of all their students are likely to be dynamic problem solving organisations, in which all staff are continually encouraged to evaluate and develop the policies and practices they use. In such schools staff need to be flexible, creative, collaborative and confident professionals, able to respond quickly and appropriately to the learning needs of a diverse and often changing student population. The support and encouragement of headteachers, or other members of a school’s management team, is crucial, providing teachers with valuable opportunities to try out new ideas, both within their own classrooms but also more widely across the school. Furthermore, headteachers are able to ensure that any developments become structural in nature so that they support the inclusion and achievements of as many students as possible. Across the four schools, some found some problems easier to resolve than others and these differences were partly to do with the schools themselves and partly to do with the particular nature of the required changes. That is, policies and practices to support inclusion were not only dependent on the nature of learners’ strengths, weaknesses and needs, but also on the human and
material resources available to the school. Thus, it seems that there can be no single best way to build inclusive practice.

**Supporting the achievements of all students, whilst safeguarding the needs of the most vulnerable**

Not only did all four schools have policies and practices in place intended to raise the achievements of students generally, they had also all developed a range of other policies and practices specifically aimed at those individuals and groups of students whom staff had identified as needing additional support. There was a strong commitment amongst many staff in all of the schools to safeguarding the educational needs of children and young people who might be more vulnerable to processes of exclusion. At the same time, concerns were expressed about the level of available resourcing to ensure that such provision was adequate, both in terms of being sufficient for those students who received it and also being able to provide extra support to other students who also might benefit from it. When giving additional resources to one class, group or individual in the schools, teachers worried about the equity of doing so relative to the learning and achievements of other classes, groups and individuals.

Underlying dilemmas raised in all four schools included: how far the basic curriculum offered in the school could be made accessible to all students or whether some students would benefit from alternative curricula; how far students should be supported within their ordinary classrooms or taught in separate (possibly specialist) accommodation; whether some students required additional provision for all, some or none of the school day; whether providing alternative arrangements enhances or diminishes students’ self-esteem and attitudes to learning. Underpinning these concerns was another important dilemma for the schools: which members of staff should have overall responsibility for supporting which students’ achievements and inclusion. There were significant variations in the ways in which each school set about reconciling these concerns. Our evidence suggests that even within individual schools some forms of provision were more or less successful than others at supporting the learning of those students for whom they were intended. Furthermore, the demands made on some schools seemed more complex than on others, both in terms of students’ needs and organisational structures.

Evidence from across the case studies suggests that schools which set out to support the highest achievements of all children and young people must also acknowledge differences between individual students so as to provide opportunities in which all are able to learn. There seem to be two principal ways that this can be accomplished. First, by putting into place whole school structures, and especially the overall curriculum framework, that promote inclusive learning by recognising different forms of achievements and acknowledging differing rates of students’ progress. Second, by supporting this work with a range of additional provision intended to ensure that those students most vulnerable to processes of exclusion are fully included in mainstream activities. When overall structures are designed to be as inclusive as possible, then additional support will probably be more straightforward to arrange, although managing this in schools with more diverse student populations is likely to be more challenging. Helping to resolve this dilemma is probably related to the previous point. That is, when staff see their school as a problem solving organisation and consider themselves to be confident professionals, they are more able to respond creatively to the circumstances and needs of all their students.

*Putting relationships are at the heart of developing achievement and inclusion*
We observed many interactions between staff and students during our visits to the four schools and, in the overwhelming majority of them, the staff’s behaviour towards students was respectful and caring. Staff spoke of their commitment to values based on social justice and equity as well as their belief that all children and young people have the right to be included in their schools and to achieve whilst there. They talked about their schools as being places that were able to make a significant difference to children’s lives, although some also spoke of the overwhelming negative impact of social/family circumstances on children’s achievements. Where there was confidence that they could make a difference, the belief in their own professional competence and that of their colleagues clearly influenced their relationships with the children and encouraged high expectations of them as learners. Our observations also indicated that relationships amongst staff were generally based on values of mutual support and respect. Finally, staff discussed the importance of encouraging positive relationships between all students. We observed numerous examples of children and young people taking time to ‘look out’ for students identified as having special educational needs, and attitudes were generally tolerant and accepting, although some staff also voiced concerns about the loneliness of a few students and the difficulties they had in terms of forming friendships.

Evidence from across the four schools suggested that above all relationships – amongst students, amongst staff and between staff and students - are at the heart of understanding and developing inclusion and achievement. This is not to promote a naïve, sentimental approach to education, in which expectations about students and staff are suppressed, but to acknowledge that teaching and learning take place within the context of human relationships, shaped by individuals’ and institutional values and beliefs. Stoll (1999: 47) has argued that:

Real improvement cannot come from anywhere other than from within schools themselves, and “within” is a complex web of values and beliefs, norms, social and power relationships and emotions’.

Relationships are formed within the culture of a school and are shaped by its values and beliefs. Whilst they may, at times, be complex and challenging they are also key to the successful development of policies and practices which support educational inclusion and achievement. Thus, cultures must be nurtured in which all members are valued equally, whilst differences between them are acknowledged and celebrated. Staff must also be supported to believe that they are able to help all students to make progress, and this in turn requires both a broader understanding of achievement as well as an acceptance of a shared responsibility for the learning of all students. However, it is also essential to recognise that doing this, every day for every child, makes huge demands on those who work in schools.

**Researching achievement and inclusion in classrooms: our current project**

Acknowledging the demands made of teachers who wish to support the inclusion and the achievement of all the children they teach has encouraged us to consider more closely the nature of the relationship between educational achievement and inclusion as part of the daily routines and practices of classrooms. That is, we have become increasingly interested in developing a detailed understanding of teaching and learning approaches and strategies which support the achievement of all children, including those who are designated as having special educational or additional support needs. We have recently begun working with two primary schools in Scotland and, as with the previous study, staff at both schools have stated their commitment to the inclusion and achievement of all children in their local communities. By working collaboratively with the teachers we hope to identify and examine examples of their
inclusive pedagogies in action and, in doing so, to articulate these in ways that will be helpful to other teachers and supportive of their practice. In this final part of the paper we discuss some of our initial thinking about this work and how we intend to build on the earlier research both in term of developing our understanding of inclusive pedagogies but also methodologically.

**Inclusive pedagogy**

Thus far, we have suggested that inclusive and high achieving schools are staffed by teachers whose pedagogical practices are based on beliefs that all children can learn. But what do we know about such practices? One of our earlier studies (Florian and Rouse 2001) examined what happens in secondary schools when subject specialist teachers attempt to create the conditions for inclusive learning in their classrooms. One notable finding was that teachers did not seem to differentiate between ‘types’ of students. Though they found the support of colleagues with specialist knowledge invaluable in determining how to respond to individual differences, they did not view pupil designation as having a special educational need, or indeed, a specific type of special educational need as particularly helpful when thinking about teaching strategies. This led us to agree that the insights of those researchers who have called for a reconceptualisation of difficulties in learning as dilemmas for teaching was a useful way forward (Hart, 1996; Clark, Dyson, Milward, & Robson, 1999; Ainscow, 1999).

Susan Hart and her colleagues (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre 2004) have persuasively argued that this reconceptualisation depends on a rejection of psychological notions of fixed ability that assume intelligence is normally distributed. Their work shows what is possible when teachers stop seeing children as points along a continuum in a positive or negative direction from an average point. Thus, a pedagogy that is inclusive of all learners is based on principles of teaching and learning that reject deficit views of difference and deterministic beliefs about ability, but see individual differences as part of the human condition (Florian, 2007). Such a view discourages teachers from seeing themselves as ‘unprepared’ or ‘not qualified’ to teach children who are identified as having special or additional needs, a common reason teachers resist including children who have been identified as having special educational needs in their classrooms. Rather teachers are empowered to work with their colleagues on adaptations that address the demands that different subjects, topics or tasks make on different learners.

Inclusive pedagogy, therefore, requires not only a different way of thinking about individual differences but also an understanding of the relationship between the learner and what is to be learned. We have suggested sociocultural theory offers a productive way of thinking about how to understand and respond to these complexities because it takes account of what happens in different contexts when people participate in activities, develop knowledge together and generally contribute to the development of the cultural beliefs, practices and artefacts which are valued in the immediate and wider contexts of social life’ (Florian and Kershner, in press, p. ). Sociocultural theory is also consistent with our view of inclusion as a complex contextual activity that is situated in the collective experience of daily life in a classroom.

From a sociocultural perspective inclusive pedagogy is best seen as a strategic process which centrally focuses on supporting the processes of children’s learning, motivation and social interaction, rather than primarily on identifying special needs, differentiating work and providing additional resources and support. One of the key elements of this process relates to the teacher’s role in deploying the available tools
and resources to support learning, with an appropriate combination of teaching strategies for different purposes (Florian and Kershner, p ).

Thus our Framework can be thought of as attempt to capture this process. However, we are concerned that the Framework itself does not limit our ability to portray the dynamic interplay between teachers’ thinking (what they know and believe) and what they do (the result of the decisions they take to support a child who is experiencing difficulty in learning).

**Knowing, Doing and Believing: a reciprocal relationship**

Elsewhere (Rouse, in press; Florian, in press) we have suggested that the challenge for teachers who wish to develop more inclusive pedagogy might be expressed as a reciprocal triangular relationship between three elements as shown in Figure 1:

![Figure 1: Knowing, Doing, and Believing](image)

In this model, all of the elements are reciprocal and any two of the three elements are thought to influence the third. Here, teachers who believe in the principle of inclusion may lack confidence in ‘doing’ but through studying or observing inclusive practice they develop the knowledge that gives them the confidence to engage in practice. Other teachers may know about inclusive practice but still be unsure about whether they believe in it, but by working in a school that has an inclusive ethos (doing), they come to see that the practice can be effective. Or, a teacher may believe in a rights-based philosophy of inclusion and be willing to try it out by including learners who might otherwise have been excluded, and in this way develop his or her knowledge about inclusive practice will develop. This model permits us to accept that teachers are in different places in terms of their knowledge, beliefs and practices but still lets us learn from their practice about how inclusive pedagogy develops and becomes embedded as an activity in a teacher’s daily work. This is the approach we intend to use in our current research with staff in the two primary schools in Scotland. By working collaboratively with them we hope that together we will be able to articulate their knowledge of (knowing), practices in (doing) and principles underpinning (believing) inclusive pedagogies, and do so in ways that will also be of value to other teachers in other schools.
References


DfES (2003b) *Data Collection by Type of Special Educational Need.* London: DfES.


### Appendix: Evidence to support the Framework for Participation

**Key: D = Documentation; O = Observations; I = Interviews**

### PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS: BEING THERE

#### Joining the school
- Admissions policies and practices
  - Admissions policy (D)
  - Practices and attitudes to admissions of a range of students (I)
  - Other local (competing) schools admissions policy documents (D)
  - Information on which schools local students attend and why (I)
  - Local and national policies on student admissions (D)

#### Staying in the school
- Exclusion policies and practices
  - Exclusion policy: fixed term and permanent (D)
  - Exclusion figures over x years: fixed term and permanent (D)
  - Policy on internal exclusions (D)
  - Stories about exclusion practices, plus attitudes of staff and students (I + O)
- Student attendance policies and practices
  - Attendance policy (D)
  - Practices to support students’ attendance, particularly those ‘at risk’ (I)
  - Stories behind students’ truancy and attendance (I)
  - Policies on ‘alternative curriculum’ (on roll but out of school? ft/p/t?) (D)
  - Stories behind ‘on roll but out of school’ (I)

#### Access to spaces and places
- Physical accessibility policies and practices
  - For students (D + O + I)
  - For staff (D + O + I)
  - For parents/carers and other visitors (D + O + I)
  - Attitudes towards increasing physical access for members of the school (I)
- Creating and maintaining a welcoming and safe school
  - Induction policies and practices for new students (D + I)
  - Induction policies and practices for new staff (teaching/non-teaching) (D + I)
  - Anti-bullying policies (D)
  - Practices to help bullies and their victims (I)
  - Stories of bullying (I)
  - Welcoming and safe or frightening places: for whom, why and when? (O + I)
  - Practices and attitudes about rules, rewards and sanctions (I + O)
  - Open or out-of-bounds places: for whom, why and when? (O + I)
  - Policies around rules, rewards and sanctions (D)

#### Access to the curriculum
- Timetabling policies and practices
  - The school’s timetable and associated policies (D)
  - History and pragmatic reasons underpinning the timetable (I)
  - Practices: which groups of students do and do not do which subjects (I)
  - Practices: students’ withdrawal from mainstream classes (O + I)
  - Practices affecting individual students’ timetable and why (I)
  - Practices affecting individual teachers’ timetable and why (I)
  - Policies: student withdrawal from mainstream classes (D)
- Access to the wider curriculum
  - Policies: lunchtime and after school clubs/activities (D)
  - Practice: lunchtime and after school clubs/activities, including who does and
PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION: LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning alongside other students
- Policies and practices which determine which students do and do not learn alongside one another
  - Selection criteria used to arrange students into teaching groups – e.g. gender; age; attainment; (dis)ability – to reduce or increase diversity (D + I)
- Selection criteria used to arrange students into pastoral groups – e.g. gender; age; attainment; (dis)ability – to reduce or increase diversity (D + I)
- Teachers’ and students’ expectations about students’ achievements (I)
- To what extent lessons comprise learning tasks which are appropriate to the full range of students in the class (O + I)

Supporting students to learn together
- Classroom practices which encourage students to use each other as a resource for learning
  - Teachers draw on students’ existing knowledge, experiences, expertise and interests (O)
  - Teaching styles support collaborative learning: e.g. group work; peer teaching; older students working with younger ones (O)
- Support staff work with range of students, not just individuals (O + I)

Members of staff working together
- Teaching staff work together to support their classroom practices
  - Team teaching, observing peers, sharing materials, etc (I + O + D)
  - Drawing on existing knowledge, experiences, expertise and interests of other teachers (I + O)
  - Teaching and support staff work together
  - Policies re in-class support: e.g. whole school and/or individual students (D)
  - Practices re in-class support: LSAs and teachers working together: planning lessons, preparing materials, working with some/all students, supporting behaviour, etc. (uses and abuses of LSAs) (O + I)
  - Practices of other support staff and teachers working together (language support, behaviour support, physiotherapy, etc.) (O + I + D)
  - Staff attendance at meetings (e.g. support staff included?) (D + O + I)

Schools and other institutions working together
- Collaborations across institutions: policies and practices: widening the range of resources available, both material and human
  - Other primary/secondary schools (D + I)
  - Primary-secondary school liaison (D + I)
  - Mainstream/specialist provision liaison (D + I)
  - Use of LA resources (D + I)
  - Other institutions? FE, HE? (D + I)

PARTICIPATION AND DIVERSITY: RECOGNITION AND ACCEPTANCE

Of the three key sections which comprise the Framework of Participation, this final one is, in some ways, the most problematic in terms of researching and understanding what is happening in a school. However, whilst its processes of participation and barriers to participation are not easy to reveal they can not be ignored. They comprise the values...
and beliefs which help to underpin the cultures of a school. Because they are often covert and unquestioned by staff and students, they permeate all policies and practices, including those considered elsewhere in the Framework. In others ways these interconnections may, however, actually support the research in that it may be possible to explore this key area of participation through the evidence gathered for the other two. Thus, any and all of the methods suggested elsewhere in the Framework (in terms of documentation (D), interviews (I) and observations (O)) will also be appropriate here.

**Recognition and acceptance of students, by staff**
- The attitudes of staff towards students as a body
- Policies and practices that acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the diversity of students and those in which differences are overlooked, misunderstood or treated with intolerance (gender, social class, ethnicity, academic attainment, classroom behaviours, (dis)ability, etc.)

**Recognition and acceptance of staff, by staff**
- Attitudes of members of staff towards colleagues according to institutional structures, hierarchies and statuses (e.g. class teachers and LSAs, SMT and classroom teachers, etc.)
- Attitudes of members of staff towards colleagues who experience difficulties in classrooms; providing support and/or shame and blame
- Policies and practices that acknowledge, appreciate and celebrate the diversity of staff and those in which differences are overlooked, misunderstood or treated with intolerance (gender, social class, ethnicity, academic attainment, classroom behaviours, (dis)ability, etc.)

**Recognition and acceptance of students, by students**
- Attitudes of students towards other individual students and groups based on sameness and diversity (gender, social class, ethnicity, academic attainment, classroom behaviours, (dis)ability, etc.), including friendships and bullying.

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