Co-operative Strategies and Inclusion

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With the help of a case study this paper explores the relationship between inclusion and co-operation and concludes that *inclusive education* necessarily promotes co-operation and *co-operative education* is inevitably inclusive.

Inclusive Education

Scotland has always been proud of its educational traditions. Its first university was founded 600 years ago and at one time there were more universities in the north east of Scotland than in the whole of England. Scotland had one of the first compulsory systems of education, following an education act of 1496 which decreed that the eldest sons of all noblemen must go to university for three years and study law. Scotland's first steps to inclusion, however, came with John Knox's *First Book of Discipline* in 1560. This set out principles for universal and compulsory education, for five to eight year olds, with a proposed school in every parish to ensure the:

> ... virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this Realm. … For the poor, if need be, education may be given free; for the rich, it is only necessary to see that education is given under proper supervision (Hunter, 1971).

Whilst that scheme was rejected by Parliament, an Act of 1696 made Knox's ideal possible, though poor literacy continued to exist.

Over the next 250 years provision was increased, also to include training of 'imbecile' children (1862) and later 'special education' for blind (1872), deaf, epileptic, crippled and mentally or physically handicapped children (1906). By 1945 it was recognised that:

> ... the broad purpose of education was essentially the same for handicapped children as it was for their more fortunate contemporaries (Sadler and Wright, 2006).

The beginning of a fully inclusive agenda was signalled with a report (Scottish Education Department, 1978) stating:

> ... it is undesirable for any pupils, but especially pupils with learning difficulties, to be segregated from the other pupils in the school and the whole range of activities available to them for all of the time.

From the mid 1990s the term inclusion is increasingly used and in 2000 a new duty was laid on Scottish education authorities to provide education for all children in mainstream schools, except under very particular circumstances.

Thus the development of the trend of inclusive education grew from the availability of basic education - a 'school in every parish', to inclusive schooling - the right for all children to learn together without being "... devalued or discriminated against by being excluded or sent away because of their disability, learning difficulty, behaviour or ethnicity" (UNESCO, 1994).

More recently the term 'special needs children' has been replaced by the much broader concept of 'children who require additional support': "While all children need support to learn some face barriers to learning which call for specific provision" (Scottish Executive, 2002).

This simple concept that all children should receive the level of support they require to

“develop their personality, skills and abilities to their fullest potential” (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2003) resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of ancillary support staff in schools. Initial teacher education in Scotland now puts inclusion at the heart of its curriculum and practices (Florian and Rouse, 2008). It is, as one university student and former special school pupil put it:

> Feeling accepted and being able to participate not just in the physical sense but also to the point where my disability is not an issue with my friends (Sadler and Wright, 2006).

Inclusion at a basic level exists by virtue of membership - simply by being there. Inclusion is the recognised membership of a group and the prevention of exclusion from that group. Educational inclusion can be described as the acknowledgement and retention of all members in a defined group. Through appropriate support and encouragement it enables all to be valued and to participate fully and appropriately in the life and work of that group.

Co-operative Education

Scotland has a strong tradition of co-operation. The earliest co-operative societies developed in Scotland - Fenwick Weavers Society in 1761, Govan 1777, Lennoxtown 1812 to name but a few. The Fenwick Weavers supported an Improvement of Knowledge Society and in 1808 set up a library for the benefit of the community (McFadzean, 2008). Although as yet there is no hard evidence, they may well have influenced David Dale and Robert Owen and the ultimate foundation of a model school in nearby New Lanark in 1816, the co-operative ethos of which is still acclaimed: “Our country’s schools must learn from the ideals of Robert Owen” (Mayo, 2011).

Scotland has its own separate education system, based on comprehensive schools with a few private or independent establishments. It has no schools with formal co-operative governance arrangements, whether specialist, trust or academy. Most reflect co-operative values through for example, school councils, peer support and mentoring schemes and co-operative teaching (Scottish Support for Learning Association, 2002). Many have espoused co-operative learning strategies. Co-operation is an underlying theme of ‘A Curriculum for

Excellence', the present framework for Scottish education from ages three to eighteen (www.ltscotland.org.uk). Teaching about co-operatives and the co-operative model of business is increasing with the help of The Co-operative Education Trust Scotland (www.cets.coop). The Trust co-operates with schools through its enterprise education programme, *Co-operate to Succeed*. Also, in association with Aberdeen University, the Trust has recently and successfully acquired a Knowledge Transfer Partnership to promote, within higher education, understanding of co-operative, mutual and employee-owned models of enterprise.

Co-operation in schools takes many forms. At one level it can apply to a school's governance, whether through formal management structures or democratic school councils. It can be the study of the co-operative model of business, perhaps with links to local co-operatives. It may be the practice of this model through school enterprise activities. Co-operation in schools may focus on activities in which the learners work together on major, possibly whole school topics such as fair-trade, citizenship, or the environment. Co-operation can centre on the learning and teaching process through formal co-operative learning methods. Co-operation may be informal as in paired reading or with the school orchestra or football team. A close examination of each shows an inextricable dependence on the co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Other papers in this *Journal* discuss these issues and provide significant insights.

Co-operative education is seen, not as the sum of all these strands, but as a generic term - a concept which permeates through each area of co-operation in school. It is in its broadest sense, education that explicitly respects, promotes and incorporates basic co-operative values.

Inclusion and Co-operation

Inclusive education is about key practices, each of which in turn illustrates basic co-operative values – those same values that underpin co-operative education:

- Recognising and acknowledging everyone who is in any specific educational community, whether class or group, school or college (solidarity).
- Ensuring everyone has a say, being heard and action taken as a result (democracy).
- Respecting each as an individual and providing equality of access and opportunity (equality).
- Providing appropriate levels of support so each can achieve their potential (equity).
- Seeking and expecting active participation (self-help and self-responsibility).

Below I describe one example that illustrates features of both inclusive and co-operative practice.

The setting is a small rural three teacher Local Authority primary school in the Scottish Highlands. Like many rural schools it is a focal point of the community. It has a strong Parent Teacher Association and welcomes members of the community who are included in various daytime and evening activities, whether working with the children to maintain the school grounds or helping with the badminton club. All of the staff, the cook, the auxiliary and ancillary staff, the head, and the visiting specialist teachers as well as the pupils are recognised as equals and part of one team. An elected pupil school council makes decisions that are acted upon.

Not only does this create an inclusive school community it also creates a very co-operative ethos. The varying needs of learners were addressed through applying aspects of Gardner's multiple intelligence framework (Gardner, 2004) and the school periodically ran 'Smart Days', each focusing on one intelligence, eg 'linguistic intelligence' or 'word smart', as the pupils preferred. These were planned and run co-operatively by various members of the school community and involved all the pupils in mixed age and mixed ability activities and challenges.

With the catchment of the school being all local primary aged pupils there is, of course, a wide range of abilities and interests, which are acknowledged and supported. Several pupils require significant levels of additional support and this is mostly provided in the classroom within a differentiated curriculum and further additional support often from a learning support teacher and auxiliary. This ensures all pupils are included in an effective way. Very often learning methods are employed, which are by definition co-operative and are also highly inclusive. Peer

mentoring and paired reading are also established practices which tacitly embrace inclusion and a co-operative approach.

At one time the pupils campaigned for an enlarged school library and with support set up a community library co-operative with all staff, pupils and interested adults as members. The library was established with the help of a Community Fund Award and an elected committee. The success of the school's inclusive ethos was demonstrated by the fact that one of those campaigning for election was a one-time non-reader, "I want to help others to enjoy reading as I do now," he announced. At one meeting, as the committee were reporting back to a senior class, the headteacher commented that she was going to arrange for the library to be open at certain times after school. "Excuse me" politely interrupted one ten year old member of the library committee, "I don't think we have agreed that yet!" In that one comment, this empowered ten year old fearlessly illustrated the expression of the embodied values of the school.

Conclusion

The preceding exploration of the meanings and practices of inclusive education and co-operative education in my view suggest that they are inextricably linked. Effective inclusion promotes a co-operative school ethos and co-operative management structures. The inclusive school reflects teaching and learning approaches that are co-operative. Inclusive education provides equal opportunities for all learners to participate and to develop to their fullest potential reflecting co-operative values. It seems evident therefore, that features of co-operative education are also those of inclusive education and schools that promote co-operation are key contributors to effective inclusion.

The Author

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