Inclusion needs a different school culture

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Teachers' beliefs and values are affecting the emerging organizational paradigm called inclusive education. A social constructivist perspective on teachers' beliefs acknowledges that teachers have their ideals and this knowledge influences their actions in the implementation of inclusive schooling. This happens within a social and cultural context of the school and the community. This paper addresses a critical aspect of the changes needed for the development of inclusive schooling and the associated professional development for teachers.

Introduction

Our knowledge and understanding of academic success and failure, and ability and disability can be considered as cultural constructions (Carrier 1990). This is because the dominant group in a society define the features of the culture that differentiate `those who can' and 'those who can't' and cultural understandings of difference are reflected not only in the beliefs and attitudes of people, but also in the reactions and behaviour of individuals (Gliedman *et al*. 1980). The beliefs and attitudes of people in a community are also reflected in the economic and political arrangements and organizations and these are contexts for differential treatment of members (Shakespeare 1994). One example of an organization in the community is our current educational system. This system was constructed to include some children and not others and in the past this differentiation has meant that some children because of individual deficits 'could not cope' within the ordinary educational system (Vlachou 1997). A 'special' education with associated professional services was created for children with 'special' educational needs. This separation between regular and special education perpetuated differentiation and promoted a traditional and medical view of disability because attention was focussed on the child and his/her supposed mental and physical inadequacy (Carrier 1986). The medical antecedents to the practice of special education have influenced the medical model of diagnosis of individual defect that was re-mediated through individual education programmes (Slee 1997) and so the medical model has influenced teacher training and beliefs, attitudes and practices in education. It seems that the separation of students with `special learning needs' has also deflected attention away from development in regular educational practices and an understanding of the broader social and cultural forces that shape them. Slee (1997) maintains that special education has concealed the failure of schools to provide an education for all comers.

Indeed, it seems that the identification and clinical judgement of children who are different or disabled is influenced by social judgements about ability and disability and social and cultural expectations of interactions in particular settings (Carrier 1989). Decisions about the education and placement of children with disabilities have resulted in a marginalized population that has been institutionalized, segregated, undereducated, socially rejected, physically excluded and made unemployed (Biklen 1988). Ballard (1997) argued that these types of outcomes are not the result of the impairment but of the social, economic and political actions that discriminate against people.

Disability can be viewed as just one form of socially constructed difference. Societies react to many kinds of difference, for example, racial characteristics, gender and identifiable lifestyles. These have been described as deviations from a defined social norm (Turner and Louis 1996). These differences may be confusing and threatening and could force individuals to confront and question commonly held assumptions and beliefs (Tierny 1993). Learning disability, speech impairment, giftedness, intellectual impairment and other terms 'that have defined the universe of educational exceptionality are formal explanations of educational success and failure that are institutionalised in important ways in the practices that separate the more or less successful students from each other' (Carrier 1989: 212). The Carnegie Council on Children's Report regarding children with disability, argued that a flawed medical-based paradigm ensured ineffective and counterproductive opportunities and outcomes for those with physical and learning disabilities (Gliedman *et al.* 1980).

A number of educators continue to subscribe to the traditional medical paradigm that treats disability as a disease and difference as a social deviance. These understandings may be submerged

in the routine of `work' and thoughts. Carrier (1989) argued that frequently there is no call for educators to articulate these understandings and beliefs. The result of continued emphasis on disability as deviance places the focus on the inadequacies and the negative characteristics rather than the strengths and abilities of the person. This results in a compensatory pedagogical model so that the educational rules are rigged (Gliedman *et al.* 1980). The role of schools still appears to be induction into the dominant culture through the imparting of set curricula rather than the meeting of students' needs as learners.

Educational reform

Recently, the issue of inclusion has been at the forefront of education (Fuchs *et al.* 1993, Fuchs and Fuchs 1994). Inclusive education was initially seen as an innovation within special education (Lipsky and Gartner 1996) but now is viewed within a broader context. For example, Ballard's (1997) definition of inclusive education embodies a number of factors: (1) education needs to be non-discriminatory in terms of disability, culture and gender; (2) it involves all students in a community with no exceptions; (3) students should have equal rights to access the culturally valued curriculum as full-time members of age appropriate regular classroom; and (4) there should be an emphasis on diversity rather than assimilation. The development of inclusion in education needs to involve two processes, described by Booth (1996). The first process is the one of increasing the participation of pupils within cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and the second process involves decreasing exclusionary pressures. Described simply, inclusive education is about responding to diversity and being open to new ideas, empowering all members of a community and celebrating difference in dignified ways (Barton 1997).

So it seems that achievement of educational equity for a diverse group of learners will require a system that eliminates categorical special needs programmes and eliminates the historical distinction between regular and special education. This system would meet the needs of learners and require professionals to personalize instruction through group problem solving, shared problem solving and negotiation (Pugach and Lilly 1984).

Inclusive education will require a school culture that emphasizes the notion of diversity and is based on a desire to explore difference and similarity (Turner and Louis 1996). Therefore, this goal of creating inclusive schools should not focus just on the needs of students with disabilities but should be embedded in the broader context of difference and similarity. By recognizing and understanding social responses to difference and establishing 'cultures of difference' within schools, equity and the inclusion of all students could be promoted.

It is possible that these cultural constructions of difference and school success and failure that are represented in personal beliefs, attitudes and values, shape how educators interact with students. Educational reformers, therefore, need more than an understanding of the classroom environment and proposed learning outcomes. They need to attend closely to understanding the cultural and social institutional setting and the beliefs and values of teachers and others who deal with a diverse range of students in the school community.

Successful learning opportunities in inclusive settings will require radical school reform, changing the existing system and rethinking the entire curriculum of the school to meet the needs of all children (Mittler 1994). The movement suggests that under great moral and political pressure, schools, curriculum and instruction could remould themselves to accommodate individual needs of all students and to produce more genuine equality of educational opportunity (Gerber 1989). It has been argued that the movement to inclusive schooling may provide the structural and cultural insights that are necessary to begin reconstructing public education for the historical conditions of the 21st century (Skrtic 1991).

A reformed understanding of student failure could include a consideration of the influence of the school culture and learning environment. This could include how instruction is organized, the curriculum, effective teaching and the nature of teaching and learning (Stanovich 1986, Blankenship 1988, Gosling 1992, Choate 1993, Cook and Slee 1993, Jordan *et al.* 1993, Swain *et al.* 1994, Algozzine *et al.* 1995, Westwood 1993, 1995a, b). The development of a child-centred pedagogy that will successfully educate all children will prove a challenge for teachers. If every child is viewed as a learner, then the concept of failing should be no longer relevant because of the prioritization of meeting learners' needs above that of achieving a predetermined response to a predetermined stimulus. School failure will always be a reality unless the student is considered central to the learning process, valued as a proactive contributor and identified as entering into all interactions with a unique set of prior experiences that shape their perceptions. The learner, rather than the teacher/curricula/dominant culture must be considered the driver of their educational experience if the

goals are engagement and success. By ignoring this responsibility to the learner, educators reinforce a deficit perception of learners who do not respond 'appropriately'.

Such changes would represent fundamental alterations in the wav teachers think about what is knowledge, teaching, learning and their role in the classroom. Gerber (1994) argued that school reformers needed to consider not only changes to the curriculum and the methods for assessing its impact, but also teachers' fundamental beliefs and knowledge.

The movement towards inclusive education has provided opportunities to develop more effective methods for teaching students with diverse learning needs and regular educators have needed to assume a greater responsibility for the education of all students in their classrooms (Choate 1993). In many instances, the effects of these changes in education are exacerbated when educators are expected to accept new policies and practices without consideration given to their individual personal beliefs and rights (Forlin *et al.* 1996b). Ainscow (1994) had warned that the policy of inclusion had the potential to unsettle educators that could prevent overall school development and improvement and the results of Forlin *et al.* (1996b) demonstrate the high stress levels of regular class teachers involved in teaching students with special educational needs.

Teachers' attitudes to inclusion

Regular education was not originally designed for exceptional learners; therefore, the need to ensure that social justice and equity goals are met for all students is a challenge for regular schools and in particular for classroom teachers (Forlin *et al.* 1996b). Educators' attitudes to inclusion are closely linked with the acceptance of children with a disability (Ward *et al.* 1994, Forlin *et al.* 1996a, Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996). Research has shown that some educators believed that the child with a disability had a right to equal educational opportunities (Semmel *et al.* 1991) but that educators' attitudes toward inclusive placements were in general negative (Center and Ward 1987, Giangreco *et al.* 1993, Forlin *et al.* 1996a) and affected the outcome of inclusion (Forlin and Cole 1993, Bender *et al.* 1995).

Teachers working in successful inclusive schools have an explicit value base that provides a platform for inclusive practices (Salisbury *et al.* 1993, York-Barr *et al.* 1996). Some advocates for inclusive schooling argue that requiring all students to be included in the regular classroom would force educators to change their beliefs and assumptions about education (Stainback *et al.* 1989). It is assumed that regular educators will take ownership and ensure that all children have an appropriate education so that a special structure for children with disabilities is unnecessary (Christensen and Dorn 1997). These authors argue that nothing in inclusion will change schools' description of disability as failures of the student. This is a more complex phenomenon that involves the values of the school culture, the nature of the learning environment and beliefs about teaching and learning. A similar notion is presented by Cook and Slee (1993: 12): 'disability is not to be overcome by changing attitudes toward "the disabled" and allowing them to "spend time" with our children. Making schools places for girls required a reconstruction of curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation. So too for people with disabilities. Integrating people into deficient educational organisations will not suffice'.

Inclusive school culture

Ainscow (1996) argued that in addressing the notion of improved school development, the culture of the school affected the differences in the way schools operated and in the way problems were solved. In reflecting on practices in schools, it was noted that there were different patterns of relations between staff and students that affected the amount and type of cooperation and collaboration that occurred and differences in motivation and confidence which affected the problem-solving required in working with students with special educational needs. A teaching culture includes beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things among the school community. It has been argued that cultures of teaching help give meaning, support and identity to teachers and their work (Hargreaves 1994).

There are school culture factors that may influence the implementation of inclusive practices. Institutional and personal factors have been identified by Thomas (1985). Some of these factors were school policy, how students are allocated to classes (mixed-ability or streaming), the principal's attitude to inclusion, the quality of support offered by the special educator, the type of relationship between the regular and the special educator (their role and responsibility), and the teachers' level of confidence in selecting appropriate teaching methods.

Other contributing factors may be 'outside' the school. Common values that exist in the local community may also influence the acceptance of difference and the implementation of inclusive practices. For example, a school that is situated in a multicultural area will have students who are different in a variety of ways. Disability is just another type of difference and may be more accepted

by staff and students in this type of school. Certain communities of people may be less accepting of differences in society. This could influence how inclusive practices are implemented and accepted. Therefore, the culture of a school needs to be considered within the community context.

A useful model for looking at school culture developed from the framework by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1988) who portrayed an 'onion skin' model of culture. The central element is the belief system and outwards from this is the value system, then the norms and standards and, at the outer level, are the patterns of behaviour that are shared. The belief systems are at the deepest level and consist of assumptions and understandings held by the people in context. Belief systems influence the value systems since it is the belief system that undergrids the value systems. Similarly value systems, those things considered important and held in high regard by the groups, will influence the norms and standards, which in turn influence patterns of behaviour. Schools can be described as 'human constructions grounded in values' (Skrtic 1991).

An organization such as a school can be conceptualized as a shared system of meaning, which includes a system of beliefs about cause—effect relations and standards of practice and behaviour (Skrtic 1991). From this perspective, inclusive schooling requires a paradigm shift that is difficult because the existing traditional (medical) paradigm self-justifies itself by distorting new information so that it remains consistent with the prevailing paradigm. Once anomalies emerge that are in conflict with the existing paradigm, a new one may begin to emerge. Skrtic (1991) argued that one wav anomalies are introduced into organizational paradigms is when values and preferences in society change.

Schools may change when ambiguities in practice and policy are resolved by confident, forceful, persistent people who manage to convince themselves and others to adopt new practices that introduce change (Weick 1985). The values and beliefs embedded in these practices create a new set of possibilities, expectations and commitments. In the past, regular education has been prevented from seeing its anomalies by removing the students who were not learning to special education. This ultimately removed a valuable source of innovation from the system (Skrtic 1991).

A critical aspect of the changes needed in schools relates to the way teachers and others in education conceptualize difference and in particular educational failure. It seems that in schools, teachers' beliefs and values are affecting the emerging organizational paradigm called inclusive education (York-Barr *et al.* 1996). Beliefs regarding acceptance of inclusive practices may affect the degree to which teachers carry out that duty (Carrington 1996).

Educational platform

Teachers' theories and beliefs for aspects of teaching, such as the purpose of schooling, perceptions of students, what knowledge is of most worth and the value of certain teaching techniques and pedagogical principles, can be described as an educational platform (Sergiovanni and Starratt 1988). This platform supports teachers' actions and it may be used to justify or validate their actions. This platform has also been described as a teacher's professional knowledge that consists of a highly personalized pedagogy, a belief system that controls the teacher's perception, judgement and behaviour (Kagan 1992). Kagan suggests that this knowledge of profession is situated in three important ways: in context-meaning it is related to specific groups of students; in content (it is related to particular academic material to be taught); and in person (it is embedded within the teachers' unique belief system). It is interesting to note that the inclusive schooling model has influenced the context for this knowledge. The specific group of students that teachers had the `knowledge to teach' has changed for experienced teachers and these are the group of teachers who have frequently been found to have negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs (Center and Ward 1987, Forlin *et al.* 1996a). It is evident that with the introduction of different educational practices, many experienced regular educators no longer found themselves as experts in their teaching role and were concerned that they were novices regarding the many new policies being introduced (Center for Policy and Leadership Studies 1995).

In the world of the classroom, the components of educational platforms may not be well known. That is, teachers tend to be unaware of their assumptions, theories or educational beliefs. Sometimes they adopt components of a platform that seem `right', that have the ring of fashionable rhetoric or that coincide with the expectation of certain others, such as teachers who they admire or of groups with which they wish to affiliate. 'Publicly they may say one thing and assume that their classroom behaviour is governed by this statement but privately or even unknowingly they may believe something else that actually governs their classroom behaviour' (Sergiovanni and Starratt 1988: 363).

Therefore, a teacher's educational platform exists at two levels: what teachers say they assume, believe and intend (their espoused theory) and the assumptions, beliefs and intents inferred from their behaviour (their theory in use). When one's espoused theory of action matches one's theory in use,

they could be considered congruent. The teacher generally knows espoused theories and theories in use are generally not known to the teacher and must be constructed from observation of teacher behaviour (Sergiovanni and Starratt 1988: 366).

The 'educational activity' (Vlachou 1997) that occurs in the classroom can be described as a dialectical interplay between situational constraints and teachers' 'espoused theory'. There is obviously a complex relationship between these concepts. Vlachou (1997) discussed an overlap between similar concepts labelled 'teacher context' and the 'educational context'. These terms are discussed in more detail in Keddie (1971) and Pollard (1985). The 'educational context' represents what happens in the real world of the classroom. For example, the teacher's routine, contact with pupils and the class activities. The 'teacher context' represents idealism and what the teachers would like to do. Both 'teacher context' and 'educational context' can contribute to and be influenced by school cultures (Woods 1983).

Professional development for inclusive education

It is quite clear that pre- and in-service training to enhance regular educators' knowledge and skills in teaching students with disabilities and learning difficulties is warranted. The beliefs that teachers have about teaching students with different learning needs and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in meeting these needs may impair the progress of inclusive schooling. Findings from a growing body of research indicate that professional development initiatives need to take teachers' beliefs into consideration (Munby 1984, Richardson et al. 1991, Schumm et al. 1994) and this is supported by the notion that teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions and judgements and therefore their behaviour in the classroom (Munby 1984, Nespor 1987, Agne et al. 1994, Schumm et al. 1994). Collectively teachers in a school community hold implicit theories about students, the subjects they teach and their teaching responsibilities, and these implicit theories influence teachers' reactions to teacher education and to their teaching practice. 'The teacher is the ultimate key to educational change and school improvement ... teachers don't merely deliver the curriculum. They develop, define it and interpret it too. It is what teachers think, what teachers believe and what teachers do at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get' (Hargreaves 1994). Professional development programmes for teachers need to consider conditions that will affect the success or failure of any new approach so that barriers to implementation of new strategies and ideals can be overcome. It has been found that staff development programmes are usually unsuccessful in bringing about attitude and belief change, but if teachers can be guided and supported in trying new procedures and see positive outcomes, then tremendous attitude change can be obtained (Guskey 1986). Therefore, traditional approaches to professional development may not produce any change in teachers' attitude, approach to curriculum, class organization and ideals about teaching and learning that will be required for inclusive schooling. The interaction between positive attitudes, knowledge about diverse learners and use of appropriate classroom strategies in the classroom is complex. For example, some teachers may have positive beliefs about inclusive schooling but may not have the knowledge and skills to allow them to do what they would like to in the classroom. These teachers may need to see other successful teachers working in inclusive settings, adapting curriculum for all learners and organizing classes to meet the needs of diverse students. Confident teachers who are respected by their peers may manage to convince other teachers to try new practices that will introduce some change in the school. Teacher mentors could work together in demonstrating different skills and guiding other teachers in the practice of new skills. For some teachers, a change in attitude will not occur unless they use the new technique or do not see any benefits in using it (Guskey 1986).

The extent to which experienced teachers' conceptions and beliefs are consistent with their practice depends, to a degree, on the teacher's opportunities to reflect on their actions (Thompson 1984). It is suggested that by reflecting on their views and actions, teachers will gain an awareness of their assumptions, beliefs and how they relate to practice. Through this reflective process, teachers may develop coherent rationales for their beliefs and classroom practices and may even become more aware of viable alternatives rather than proceeding on impulse and intuition (Jackson 1986). Teachers need both the skills of their profession and the belief that their skills can make a difference (Soodak and Podell 1993). Therefore, professional development programmes will need a balance of presentation of information and strategies for inclusive education and opportunity for reflection on current thinking and practice. Teachers will also need time to practice new instructional practices in the context of their classrooms and most importantly, they will need the support of their peers (Swafford 1998). Teachers who work together will have more opportunities to investigate and explore their beliefs and attitudes and instructional alternatives. School staff could then be encouraged to

develop a shared commitment and vision for future development towards inclusive schooling and will be more committed to achieving that goal.

Conclusion

The equal importance of cognitive and procedural components to any professional development for inclusive education needs to be addressed for enduring change in the school and the classroom (Showers *et al.* 1987). If schools wish to move towards inclusive schooling, members of the administration team and external school consultants will need carefully to consider the influence of core values of the local community and collective values, experiential knowledge and skills of the school staff and the traditional values of the school. The provision of day workshops on inclusive schooling, where external consultants present selected content about disabilities and teaching strategies will not be successful without more involvement in the school and its community. Reflection on current beliefs and practice is necessary. Rethinking and planning for inclusive schooling often represents a substantial departure from teachers' prior experience, established beliefs and present practice. Indeed, `they are encouraged to provide conditions of learning for children that the teachers themselves have rarely experienced' (Little 1993: 130).

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