

Why is inclusionality so important to me?: Ticking the Inclusionality Box

MA Assignment – An Educational Enquiry: Victoria Kennedy

March 2005

Introduction

This assignment investigates the journey from a trainee to a post newly qualified teacher (NQT) status. I have wondered to what extent my teaching has evolved over the past 2 years and how this has impacted on learning in the classroom. This has led to a focus for the assignment on the exploration of relationships for learning by creating an inclusional space for all children to feel safe to learn. This assignment is going to be described from a personal perspective of my journey.

What is inclusionality and why is it important to me?

Rayner (2005) states that inclusionality is “an awareness that space, far from passively surrounding and isolating discrete massy objects, is vital, dynamic inclusion within, around and permeating natural form across all scales of organisation, allowing diverse possibilities for movement and communication.”

The most striking words within this sentence are “inclusion within” and “diverse possibilities for movement and communication.” This can be interpreted within a classroom context as ensuring a space which encompasses all and challengingly, allowing learning to transcend boundaries using variable communication.

As teachers, we are challenged to encompass all students in learning, cater for all learning styles, special educational needs and cover the curriculum in a short space of time. I am proposing that by creating an inclusional space within a classroom, these challenges are easier to overcome by creating a free flow of communication for learning conversations between teacher and students and between peers.

I have taken a particular interest in this topic as 'safety' throughout my life has been a fundamental requirement that I have not been consistently exposed to. Like many students, I come from a broken and violent home and rarely felt physically or emotionally safe or secure. *Appendix 1* offers a greater insight into these driving forces explaining "why I do what I do."

As each day dawns and a new class enter our space, we have no idea of the events and emotions that are under the skin of each child as they pass into our care. Mary Earl (2000, p.59-60) draws on Erikson's (1984) suggestions that "students are not a tabula rasa (blank sheet). He or she brings to adolescence certain psychological assets and also certain liabilities arising from their previous negotiations of Life Stages." This can result in a series of *positive assets* and *psychological liabilities*. As a result, the space within my classroom aims to be supportive and build confidence and develop a depth of learning without making my values orally explicit.

There is a concern that a 'safe' space will be a stagnant dull space, however, Rayner (2005) suggests that pain can be changed into creativity within inclusional, dynamic boundaries meaning that learning can take place in a safe yet energised environment.

How was this investigation undertaken?

This study is an educational enquiry which "should be concerned primarily with the creation and testing of educational theories that can explain educational influences in the learning of oneself, in the learning of others and in the education of social formations" (Whitehead, 2005, p.1). Yet, how should an educational enquiry be undertaken?

McNiff (2002, p.9) outlines the Action Reflection Cycle which is a process of action research undertaken by the practitioner with practice reflection and resulting modification at the heart of the process. The process can be quite convoluted yet McNiff's basic structure is shown below:

"Identify an area of practice to be investigated;

Imagine a solution;

Implement a solution;

Evaluate the solution;

Change practice in light of the evaluation.....”

This is a very practical and rewarding approach to work based research as you, the practitioner, are guiding and developing the process over a period of time. It is challenging to prove that learning “results” are directly credited to the reflections and modifications incorporated into the process. However, it is ultimately clear that reflection, the focus on improvement and the resulting involvement of students within the process could not be detrimental to learning.

In light of this cycle, my educational enquiry did not start when I began my Master’s Course but has been an inherent part of my career and day to day activities. This becomes particularly apparent in the remainder of the document.

One of the key methods used during the enquiry was video footage. This was an important method for the enquiry as it is often challenging to assess differences in behaviour, intonation and body language from paper based observations. However, Ethical considerations were taken into account (BERA, 2004). Internal videoing of students is common practice at the school and is accepted by the students. The students involved in this investigation were aware that they were being taped and agreed to be involved in the process. Furthermore, the tapes will not be made publicly available as this enquiry not be made public in a research sense but will be returned once marked.

Thus far, the document has outlined my area of interest and will now expand on the notion of “ticking the boxes” before embarking on the remainder of the action reflection cycle.

What makes the ideal lesson?

The concept of an ‘ideal lesson’ is introduced to trainee teachers as a goal to aspire towards. The school staff handbook (The John Bentley School, 2004, p.97-98) uses the DfES Guidance to set out clear indicators for the requirements of a model lesson. These include the following key components:

- “1) The teacher plans effectively and sets clear objectives that are understood.
- 2) The teacher shows good subject knowledge and understanding.

- 3) The teaching methods used enable the students to learn effectively.
- 4) Students are well managed and high standards of behaviour and insisted upon.
- 5) Student's work is assessed thoroughly.
- 6) Students achieve productive outcomes.
- 7) The teacher makes effective use of time and resources.
- 8) Homework is used effectively to reinforce and extend learning."

(Details of each section are included in *Appendix 2*)

Whilst undertaking teacher training, these guidelines are used as a recipe for a good lesson. I felt that it was a case of "ticking the boxes" and ensuring I had catered for each point individually. I often felt that students were on the other side of an invisible barrier and that as long as I included all these factors, my lesson would be a great success. I used to come away from lessons judging my own performance as opposed to the learning of each individual student.

However, I was observed a number of times during my NQT year and the clip included as *Appendix 3* highlights a number of strategies used to tick the DfES boxes.

What was I doing?: NQT Stage Analysis

A fundamental part of a strong lesson is to outline the objectives. The clip (*Appendix 3*) clearly demonstrates the use of differentiated objectives. One could say this was a "tick in the box," however, closer analysis of the clip shows that I did not fully engage with the group. I was focusing on one side of the class and explaining in "teacher speak" rather than student friendly, accessible terms. Furthermore, I did not check understanding of these central points to the lesson and the security of mind for the students.

Perhaps a significant positive point within the lesson was when I was engaging in a conversation with one individual using scaffolded questioning. The eye contact and movement of the teacher to evaluate learning through

non-verbal communication is evident and it is pleasing for me to watch the development of learning to a higher level. However, when compared with a similar conversation in a clip from a recent lesson (*Appendix 4*, 7mins 45secs) the facial expression of pleasure and the ultimate free flow of connectivity between teacher and student are starkly absent in the first clip.

After the lesson, the feedback I received from the observer was very positive (*Appendix 5*). However, I felt disappointed and strangely empty as I knew that I'd followed the recipe. Although, the lesson had been superficially strong, the lack of loving energy was apparent.

This belief was strengthened further at the end of the year when the faculty videoed groups of students responding to questions about their humanities lessons. I was fortunate as most comments were very positive yet when the year 8 group of students were asked "Do you know what you are going to do in a lesson?" One of my students responded, "No, not really." This was very revealing as again, differentiated objectives were clearly displayed on the board at the start of each lesson and I would also read them out to the group. Nevertheless, this highlighted that although I was completing my recipe for a perfect chocolate cake, it was missing that extra ingredient which made the people eating it love it!

What improvements did I want to create?

Cho (2005, p. 79) states that "love has the power to inspire students to seek after knowledge, love can unite the teacher and student in the quest for knowledge, and the love of learning can even empower students to challenge knowledge thereby pushing its limits."

My current school literature (The John Bentley School, 2004, p.28) embodies Cho's theories by highlighting the importance of putting "values into practice" and quotes Ginott "I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal." The literature also translates these values into a student friendly version which refocuses these checklists on the people that matter and are at the centre of everything that we do. This is why I moved 200 miles to work in the school and this is where my direction for development as a teacher has taken me.

Whilst I am confident in my ability to create a variety of differentiated resources and to plan DfES focused lessons, it has only been recently that I

have felt that the students in my classes are maximising their learning and that I am able to evaluate each child's learning more effectively. This is because I have both consciously and subconsciously become focused in creating an inclusional environment where students know that I care, they feel safe to learn and to gain the maximum support they require. This is firmly linked to the literature I have read:

"A child who is hungry cannot learn. A child who is stressed cannot learn. A child who is in an environment absent of unconditional love cannot learn. In fact, the brain of a child who feels emotionally or physically threatened produces chemicals that actually inhibit learning" (Cates, 2004, p.1).

Therefore, in order to achieve maximum potential for learning it is crucial to be aware of individual student's needs with regard to safety from both objects and situations. Earl (2000, p.63) draws on Maslow's hierarchy of needs stating that "until those primary needs are met, significant cognitive and development is impossible."

In conjunction with the feeling of safety in order to learn, is the feeling of support from teachers and peers. Vygotsky, (1896-1934) takes this notion further as he "believed that it is through interaction with others that the child develops an understanding of self and a capacity for thought. For Vygotsky, the relationship between teacher and learner, and between learners and other learner, was the key to promoting more effective learning" (Walford, 2000, p. 38) However, students must feel confident to interact with each other and able to get things wrong in order to use Vygotsky's methods to the full. This would encourage a deeper level of learning and demonstrates a clear link between safety and collaborative learning.

In order to achieve successful collaborative learning, the student is unlikely to be driven by purely extrinsic motivation. Walford (2000, p, 40) describes Skinner's extrinsic approach to motivation as "positive and negative reinforcement." In order to fully engage in the process of learning and have a collaborative attitude within the class it is more likely that students would need to be largely intrinsically motivated. Hunt (1961 and 1971) describes intrinsic motivation as a motivation stemming from the student and that this motivation is not driven by external rewards.

This reading can be summarised in a few simple points demonstrating the learning environment that I wish to create within my classroom. Firstly, a student's individual needs must be acknowledged, students should feel

supported and cared for in a safe, largely self motivated environment, this space should encourage collaborative learning and allow for creativity.

How have I improved my inclusional space?

The next stage of the enquiry was to assess how I had managed to integrate these points into my learning environment as my teaching experience has progressed. I state clearly that besides undertaking the enquiry, hence involving the students in the process and developing an extra layer of inclusionality, I have not consciously made fundamental changes to my teaching style. It is more that this is the environment that I always wished to create. I am now more comfortable with myself, my style, my relationships with the students and my space which has enabled me to exhibit the values I really believe in to a greater extent. The following section outlines the evidence that the inclusional space is more explicit within my classroom.

This year I took on a new year 10 class, many of the students I had taught in the previous year and had developed some form of relationship. I decided to use this class as a focus for most of my evaluation. This took the form of motivation diaries, lesson observation by a learning support assistant and use of video and progress grades.

In October (prior to commencing the enquiry) the school trialled 100 minute lessons. The on task behaviour of the group was recorded by a county advisor. The advisor monitored the time spent on task for 5 students within the group. The results showed a high level of focus of the group, which was particularly apparent as the lesson continued for 100 minutes. Within the lesson I took students to one side and discussed their progress. The County Advisor commented on the effectiveness of these conversations and that the relationship between the teacher and students was mutually strong.

This suggests that the students felt intrinsically motivated within the lesson as no external reward or punishment was offered. In order to test this further I asked students to complete a motivation diary. On the first day of using the diary the students were asked to respond to a series of questions for their homework. This was set as homework to allow students thinking time and also to encourage independent and truthful responses. The questions were open questions and only acted as a prompt to avoid leading the students. The results from the students I had taught the previous year showed a greater depth in response which proved useful. For example:

“Miss Kennedy works with us and we get to understand as a group” (Y10, girl)

“My relationship with Miss Kennedy is student-teacher but it is friendly. It’s an older friend, fine she’s my teacher but I treat her like a friend.” (Y10, boy)

The key points to draw from these statements are the emphasis on collaborative learning and that the students feel confident enough to discuss their opinions. This is highlighted after a later lesson where I had asked the students to comment on the activities, motivation and learning in the lesson and one girl (a kinaesthetic learner) constructively criticised the lesson saying that the activities relied heavily on visual work. I took heed and during the next lesson and subsequent lessons I thought more carefully about targeting a range of learning styles. The following write up said:

“Thank you for listening” (Year 10, girl)

This indicates that there is an inclusional environment and that the boundaries are constantly changing. This allows the students to take more control of their learning at some points. The diaries are also an excellent insight into the issues faced by students and allow the students to feel safer and listened to about their learning.

A further issue raised by the diaries was that one quiet girl that I had not taught prior to this year felt that I did not know her. This rang true and I have since made a conscious effort to get to know her and focus on improving her learning. It was difficult to approach this without it appearing forceful as the student would be aware that I had read her diary. I quietly took her aside and said that I’d read her diary, she was right and that I would do something about it if she would like me to. She nodded.

Since that lesson she has contributed more in class and her grades have improved from a D grade to an A- between September and March. The quality of the student’s work and the clear effort and motivation that she is applying has increased and she appears far more relaxed. This suggests that the student feels safer and ultimately more intrinsically motivated. Furthermore, the student is taking a more active role in class discussions and is beginning to ask questions as the relationship develops further.

Although the aim of the motivation diaries was to monitor and record changes and progress, this evidence shows that they have been fundamental to improving the relationships for learning and feel of inclusionality and collaboration as they have been used as a tool for communication. The process has informed me of where to improve and also allowed students to

feel supported and cared for. This is particularly evident in the response to the critical comment.

A key piece of evidence demonstrating the modifications I have made is the video clip shown in *Appendix 4*. This clip was taken of a standard lesson with the Year 10 class. I deliberately did not make any special effort with my planning. This is primarily because I now feel comfortable and confident enough to be at ease with the group and wanted to record my usual behaviour. There are clear comparisons to be drawn with the clip from the previous year (*Appendix 3*). For example, I am sitting on the front row of desks in this clip. This aimed to engage with the students, reduce the level between us and get closer to this smaller group. I also smiled genuinely within the clip, showing the embodied pleasure of their company and their progress. This is further highlighted when I have the conversations with individuals or small groups. In contrast to the previous clip, there is a sense of authenticity in the praise which is physically shown with a 'thumbs up' or a smile. The tone of voice is far more genuine than the more superficial and monotone praise in the first clip.

The starter activity in the clip also shows two supportive and subtle engagements with a lower ability individual. In addition to the paired discussion, which aimed to support students in a high risk activity, I glanced over and made eye contact and a small nod to this student. This was a non-threatening and supportive action to let the student know that I was there to help and that they were progressing well without drawing attention to him. Again, this subtly is a very important part of my aim to make the environment safe and inclusive for each individual. Although the students may wish to support each other in their learning they need to be aware that some of their personal needs are separated from the direct learning needs for that particular lesson.

The final clip (*Appendix 6*) demonstrates how the feedback between teachers and students is valued in the school. Providing these clips are used effectively and lessons are learnt then they are important tools for communication, improving relationships for learning and monitoring your own teaching and learning.

The clip shows two Year 8 students discussing my lessons. A series of questions were displayed on the interactive wipeboard and the students discussed these without a teacher in the room. The fact that students undertake this activity in such a positive manner and make constructive comments demonstrates the high level of inclusivity and safety. However, this

would not continue to be the case if the comments were not acted or commented upon by the teacher otherwise the process appears superficial and of little worth.

Again, this clip brings out similar issues as the motivation diaries for Year 10 and the lesson video clip. For example, the female student describes the class as mostly working in pairs and both students comment on the level of praise and support that they receive even if they get things wrong.

Interestingly, the male student describes that positive support is offered if the student is trying and is not messing about otherwise they will get told off. This is a strong belief that I present to the group subconsciously that those that try, however difficult they find it I will support them as a priority. This stems from my deeply held value that attitude to work and the ability to succeed for your own pleasure. I believe that this has improved motivation of some lower ability students and allowed students to ask questions, feel safe and feel pride in their own work and personal goals. This is potentially an area to explore further and gain evidence in the future.

A minor yet significant change to my teaching is the demise of the 'Toptastic Tin of Triumph.' This was a decorated pot containing small extrinsic rewards that I used throughout my NQT year. During this year I have only used it with year 7 in the first few weeks and no longer need this method to maintain motivation. This is particularly true for the classes that I have taught for a longer period of time as the individuals have adapted to the environment. Moreover, the students' behaviour and motivation to work has noticeably improved to the detriment of the infamous Toptastic Tin of Triumph.

So where am I am what do I need to do next?

The results of this enquiry have shown a clear progression throughout the journey. It is not that my values have changed in the classroom but that I am now able to refocus on genuinely engaging with the students. Furthermore, I can concentrate on the space, the learning relationships and individual needs, rather than the flurry of ensuring my lesson contains all the key components. This is pleasing to discover and to see the changes that have taken place however, the key components must not be forgotten.

The evidence shows that the importance of making the lessons accessible to all through a true pleasure and care for their learning and person is crucial. This can be done by constantly evaluating the success of lessons and making

improvements for individuals. These factors cannot be set aside as a bonus but more of a fundamental principle.

Furthermore, this enquiry has demonstrated to me the importance of involving students in their learning and the process of improving learning. Therefore, I'm going to use motivation diaries with all my classes next year and call them "reflection diaries" for reflective learning and lesson evaluation.

I hope that this will help me to take my understanding of individual student's needs further. The key aim is to acknowledge and adapt for these students. It may not mean altering all of the resources, more likely it will involve changes in language and relationships and 'talk' between the teacher and the student. This will enable the student to feel important enough to be safe and respected in order to achieve their potential.

How useful has this educational enquiry been?

The title of the enquiry was "Why is inclusionality so important to me?" It is the process of learning from past personal experiences that drives me to teach and constantly urges me to improve, not for me but for the students. This cycle of reflective enquiry has allowed me to evaluate my values and assess the level to which I have incorporated these into my teaching. I feel that this enquiry has achieved its goal and has inspired me to delve deeper in the future.

In order to improve the investigation it would be beneficial to follow a group of students from a first meeting over an extended period of time and use their voices as an evaluating and guiding force for the enquiry. It would however be difficult to separate the incorporation of the enquiry process from their progress. I take this idea as an ultimate goal to involve all our students in a reflective cycle in order to make them feel valued, safe and to ultimately improves their learning.

References

BERA (2004) *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.
Nottigham: BERA.

- Cates, C. (2004) *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Retrieved on the 9th March 2005 from www.thelibrarylady.net/childhood
- Cho, D. (2005) *Lessons of Love: Psychoanalysis and Teacher-Student Love*. Educational Theory, Vol. 55, No. 1, pp.79-95.
- Earl, E. (2000) *Classroom Pastoral Care and the Work of the Pastoral Tutor*. In Beck, J and Earl, M. (Ed.) (2000) *Key Issues in Secondary Education*. London: Continuum, pp.57-66.
- Hunt, J.McV. (1961) *Intelligence and Experience*, New York: Ronald Press.
- Hunt, J.McV. (1971) *Using intrinsic motivation to teach young children*. Educational Technology, Vol. 2, No. 2.
- McNiff, J. (2002) *Action research for professional development: Concise advice for new action researchers*. Retrieved on the 12th March 2005 from www.jeanmcniff.com/booklet1.html
- Rayner, A. (2005) *Essays and Talks about 'Inclusionality.'* Retrieved on the 12th March 2005 from www.bath.ac.uk/~bssadmr/inclusionality/
- Rayner, A. (2005) *Introduction to the "Complex Self."* Retrieved on the 12th March 2005 from www.bath.ac.uk/~bssadmr/inclusionality/complexself.htm
- The John Bentley School (2004) *The John Bentley School Staff Handbook*. Calne: The John Bentley School.
- Whitehead, J. (2005) *Creating Educational Theories from Educational Enquiries of the kind, "How do I improve my educational influence?" A response to Gorard and Nash*. DRAFT 12 March 2005. Paper for submission to The Journal of Educational Enquiry. Bath: Department of Education, University of Bath.
- Walford, R (2000) *Classroom Teaching and Learning*. In Beck, J and Earl, M. (2000) *Key Issues in Secondary Education*. London: Continuum, pp. 36-42.

Appendices

- Appendix 1:* Why I do what I do
- Appendix 2:* Checklist for a model lesson
- Appendix 3:* NQT lesson clip
- Appendix 4:* Year 10 geography lesson clip
- Appendix 5:* Observation document from the NQT lesson
- Appendix 6:* Year 8 discussions