

Teacher education for inclusive practice – Responding to policy

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Abstract

This article draws on research in one teacher education course in England and examines the ways in which the program prepares student teachers for inclusive practice in science teaching. We frame our analysis by drawing on aspects of institutional mediation of official policy in teacher education, as well as theories around inclusion and critical pedagogy. Using data from official sources, lecture material, and interviews, we argue that in order to achieve real inclusion in teacher education programs we need pedagogies of praxis that move beyond (and sometimes against) the official policy definitions of inclusion, and draw instead on a more critical approach to the formation of future professionals.

Keywords: inclusive practice, initial teacher education, education policy, England

Introduction

Those recommended for the award of Qualified Teacher Status should: teach lessons and sequences of lessons across the age and ability range for which they are trained in which they use a range of teaching strategies and resources ... taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and inclusion (Teacher Development Agency, England, QTS25a, 2012)

Throughout Europe and beyond we see increasingly such statements requiring teacher education courses to actively promote inclusive practice, and to develop relevant ‘skills’ of future teachers (DeLuca, 2012; Sosu, et.al. 2010). The earlier focus on inclusion in relation to special needs pupils, has gradually encompassed social, cultural, linguistic and economic dimensions of disadvantage in recognition of the ever expanding diversity of learners in the classrooms. The

inclusion agenda has provided a platform for the development of changing the cultures of integration of students with differences within schooling systems across Europe (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Bartolo, 2010; EADSNE, 2010), with the European Commission (2012) explicitly linking the quality of teachers' competences and knowledge to the achievements and progress of diverse learners.

The ways in which these fairly ambiguous requirements are understood and enacted in particular national, local and institutional contexts vary significantly. Mapping 'inclusion' to different governments' reform agendas, and traditions of pedagogy within schooling systems, produces pictures of great diversity. This paper draws on a case study of designing a teacher education program to meet the requirement for 'inclusion' and documents the significance of the English¹ policy context as well as views of teaching and pedagogy, that frame what 'reading' of inclusion is possible.

Teacher education programs in England are expected to prepare future teachers for inclusive practice, and to deal with diversity of their pupils in all its forms. But the context of such practice is one of highly differentiated school environments, where the pressures of the market place through competition with other schools, student choice, publication of examination results, are combined with pressures for high academic standards. Contemporary policy ideas about what constitutes 'teaching quality' are important. The current government, similarly to their predecessors, have been using discourses about teaching as a 'craft' which have implications for the state of teacher education (Menter et.al., 2010). This is visible in two ways. First, since 2010, the government has produced policy statements that challenge the significance of university-based teacher education provision (White Paper "*The Importance of Teaching*", 2010), and emphasize relatively simplistic ideas about 'effectiveness', 'impact' and performativity in teacher education (Beach & Bagley, 2013). Second, pursuing an increasing emphasis on standards, excellence and 'competencies' for teachers, teacher education has become heavily regulated by frameworks that define the competencies that course providers have to develop in the teacher trainees (HCEC, 2012). Nobody of course can object to narratives of high standards and educational excellence. But, such narratives can be part of a range of policy paradigms, not all of which are conducive to an inclusive, socially just education (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014).

So, how do teacher education programs deliver the multiple and often contradictory aims of the government policy? and, how do existing policy frameworks support the discourse of inclusion in practice? Evidence from countries where inclusion is an expectation in teacher education, suggests that newly qualified teachers feel ill-prepared to deal with diverse classrooms, and are ambiguous as to their understanding of 'inclusion' as a teaching principle, especially since they face school organization and policy requirements that are based on non-inclusive principles (DeLuca, 2012; O'Neill et.al., 2009; Sosu et.al., 2010). There are exceptions. The Inclusive Practice Project supported by the Scottish government is an example of connecting the structural features of teacher education to issues of social justice and educational equality, and hence develop teacher education courses that articulate an 'inclusive pedagogy' (Florian et.al., 2010:712; Rouse & Florian, 2012). There is however little policy learning within the borders of

¹ In 1999 the UK devolved powers to a Parliament in Scotland, and Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, with Education being one of the devolved policy areas. References to 'the government' in this paper point to the UK government based in London, which relates to English education.

the UK, and the Scottish initiative has not (yet) had any visible impact on the way the government conceives of teacher education.

This paper will present results from research in one teacher education program in an English university. The focus of the research is on the ways in which the program prepares student-teachers for inclusive practice in teaching science. More specifically, our research looks at: (a) the ways in which the policy framework shapes the institutional provision of teacher education in relation to 'inclusion'; (b) how teacher educators understand inclusive practice and integrate 'inclusion' through the yearly activities; and, (c) what are the main challenges that staff face in relation to an inclusive pedagogy, and how do they cope with these.

Inclusion as an idea and as practice

The concept of 'inclusion' is one of the most flexible signifiers of the last twenty years in terms of a policy discourse, but also in terms of its use and understanding in educational settings. UNESCO (2009) defines inclusive education as 'an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination'. This definition, also adopted by the 2010 European Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training connects inclusive education with principles of equity, social justice and participation. In a more limited approach, OECD (2012:15) defines equity-as-inclusion in human capital development terms, so that 'all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion)'.

Within critical academic analyses, inclusion has been conceptualized as a political perspective that aims to re-order social arrangements. Inclusive pedagogy is defined against economic and social reproduction regimes, and provides a radical challenge to the elitist, exclusionary and hierarchical status of schooling. These perspectives advocate radical transformations since education as well as the political and social system around it are designed to fail, marginalize or exclude certain student groups in order for the system to perform its main function which is positioning people in employment and social hierarchies. Placing some faith in the empowerment potential of education processes, perspectives classified as 'functionalist' by Raffo & Gunter (2008) view institutions such as schools as having the capacity to mediate social inequalities and redress disadvantage. In this genre, well designed and funded interventions may add significant value to what the schools do, and benefit students from disadvantaged settings. Both in the EU and across the UK, initiatives for combating 'exclusion' tend to promote liberal understandings of the relationships between poverty, disadvantage, and education, aiming to address these through improvements of educational standards. Even though there has been a multitude of alternative provisions for young people excluded from mainstream schools, the effectiveness of these was at best localized and short-lived (Alexiadou, 2002). Within schools, for most teachers and teacher education students the term 'inclusion' refers to the rather narrow definition of integrating special education pupils within mainstream classrooms, without as Kyriacou, et.al. (2013) suggest much attention to the conditions necessary for the successful integration of these students into the academic and social life of the school.

In this paper inclusion is understood as enabling young people through the work of the school to overcome barriers to a full engagement with social, economic and political aspects of their life. It is conceptualized in relation to the nature of knowledge students acquire, the pedagogy that is

needed for students with individual differences to access the curriculum and, forms of assessment that lead to both subject-related learning but also transformative learning with the capacity to create empowered individuals. Teacher education needs to develop professionals who view teaching as partly a political activity and be prepared to examine their practice through engagement with their pupils in all their social, cultural, and ethnic diversity (Allan, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004). This is a challenging enough role for teacher education, but in a context of increasingly competitive local school markets and tight regulation by inspections that emphasize and prioritize a more mechanistic approach to pedagogy, ‘doing’ inclusion in action becomes even more problematic.

Given this context, it is more important than ever to examine the practices and values of teacher educators and student teachers in order to reveal the areas of conflict and tension, as well as the conceptions practitioners hold in relation to inclusive practice. In doing so, we contribute to the debate around the meanings and practices of inclusion in teacher education, but also identify spaces for alternative political praxis.

The study

Our research was organized as a case study of preparing science teacher education students for inclusive practice, and our focus was on one University-based teacher education department. We collected documents produced by the teacher education course team to respond to the Teacher Education Development Agency standards, that students have to meet to qualify for teaching status, as well as the Ofsted² areas of focus that the course would be inspected on; We conducted interviews with seven staff members involved in the design and delivery of the Post-graduate Certificate in Education course (PGCE)³; We collected teaching materials used by PGCE lecturers on “differentiation”, and “cultural diversity” in teaching science trainees; and, finally, we observed 8 University-based lectures and workshops aimed at students. The research also included survey and documentary data produced by and with the science teacher education students. In particular, we carried out a qualitative survey sent to 45 students followed by 17 qualitative interviews. We also analysed 23 essays and further student work (including posters) on the topic of ‘inclusion’, ‘diversity’ and ‘special needs’ in science teaching. For this article we draw mainly on the analysis of documentary and lecture material and interviews with staff. We only selectively draw on students’ materials – in so far as these highlight issues relevant to the institutional response to inclusion.

We were interested in what the research participants took as inclusion and inclusive pedagogy, what examples they produced, and how they represented the challenges or difficulties in practicing inclusion. All the data was analyzed using a combination of thematic coding and discourse analysis (Alexiadou, 2001). The process involved an initial inductive approach where

² The inspectorate for providers of services which care for children and young people, and for those providing education and skills for learners in England (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>).

³ PGCE – a one-year course for graduates that train to become teachers in England. Successful completion of the course leads to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), needed to teach in state schools.

transcripts and documents were de-constructed and themes were formulated that captured the meaning of the text. The themes were mutually exclusive, clearly defined, and of a similar level of abstraction, and represented a first level of analysis, which meet the criteria for logical consistency, and representativeness. Themes were then described for their particular characteristics and links are drawn between them. They refer to descriptions of: (i) the actors involved in teacher education (tutors, students, school pupils), (ii) the particular contexts of schools, and the university (including inspection processes), (iii) the pedagogic interventions and strategies used and encountered within schools and in the teacher education program, (iv) 'inclusion' as a pedagogic practice. The themes are then interrogated from the point of view of their 'functions' in the text and we follow Potter et.al. (1993) in their approach to discourse analysis as a "method of studying social practices and the actions that make them up" (p.383). We ask the question 'what do people and documents *do* with their talk/text' - what discursive resources they draw to justify their position, to manage tensions, to rhetorically promote alternatives, and (in the case of interviewees) to place their 'self' as accountable for certain actions. We illustrate with a brief example: the theme 'conceptions of ability' relates to the descriptions of pupils as provided by University tutors, in students' essays, and official documentation. The theme has a number of characteristics to do with perceptions of its 'fluidity' and conditions for its development, and it relates to other themes that are concerned with 'knowledge capacity', 'pedagogic interventions', and 'policy contexts'. 'Ability' is also used to evaluate lesson plans, curriculum and assessment choices, the effectiveness of teaching strategies, as well as to discursively justify particular conceptions of inclusion. At a more theoretical and ideological level, the constructions of the theme of 'ability' draw on core understandings of the nature of human learning, as well as the potential for transformation through education practice.

Linking back to our core research focus we related the analyzed themes to (a) institutional structures within the program of teacher education, (b) staff experiences of integrating 'inclusion' into teaching practice, and (c) understandings of inclusion in relation to teaching and pedagogy. These three areas are used to organize our presentation of findings.

Findings

The Institutional Context

In England there are University-led and School-led teacher education options. The first is (still) the most common route to achieving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Students can follow a model of training where they complete a postgraduate course in education after they have acquired their Bachelor degree. Alternatively, they can follow a concurrent model of training (completing a Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor Science with an inbuilt QTS course). The course of our study is a University-led, 12 months full time program and is offered at postgraduate level. It provides Initial Teacher Education for the ages 11-16. Like most PCGE programs it has both academic and vocational elements to its structure, with strong links to local partnership schools where trainees spend considerable time during their teaching practice. The stated aims of the program are to help trainees develop subject knowledge and pedagogy for that subject, prepare them on the professional aspects of training and a career in teaching, and to develop students' affective qualities including reflective practice. The science part of the course

covers the school subjects of Biology, Chemistry, Geology, and Physics and is a 36 weeks course, with a minimum of 120 days spent in school placement. The students spend concentrated study time at University, where they attend lectures and workshops and produce coursework.

During 2012, the course was explicitly designed around the ideas of ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’. Our first task was to explore the decisions behind this focus. Our interviews revealed three broad institutional incentives and rationales put forward: (i) the pressure from Ofsted that raised concerns about the effectiveness of integrating these issues into practice, (ii) a professionally and pedagogically-driven understanding of the need to respond to the needs of the local area and schools, and, (iii) the powerful pressures that the market exercised in terms of student satisfaction and future recruitment.

Regulatory frameworks and institutional responses

The capacity of inspectorates to govern education and regulate content and methods is well documented (Ehren & Visscher, 2006; Rönnerberg et.al., 2013). Ofsted actively shapes the nature of provision in teacher education in England and very effectively uses school improvement research as evidence to direct change in particular areas of work. The course in our study was inspected in 2011. In an otherwise positive report, Ofsted raised the issue of the course not actively promoting students’ understanding of ‘equality’, and ‘diversity’ in planning and teaching. In addition they pointed that: ‘central training includes a focus on the wider aspects of diversity such as social class, gender and sexuality but these are not fully reinforced through school based training’. In their final recommendations which can be interpreted as “sharp prescriptions” (van Bruggen, 2010:54), the inspectors asked that ‘trainees promote all aspects of equalities and diversity through their teaching’. The effects of the inspection did not end with the inspection cycle, since the course team have to produce a self-evaluation document that goes both to the Teacher Development Agency (TDA), and to Ofsted, in a process of binding external inspectors to internal evaluators (Hall & Noyes, 2009).

Even though Ofsted was a key driver for the instigation of this focus, the standards that emerged from the TDA (called The Teaching Agency, since 2012) define an additional regulatory framework for the course. In the year of the research, there were 33 National Standards that teacher education institutions were following, one of which explicitly addressed issues of inclusion, diversity, and equality.

As a result, the response of the PGCE team was swift. The year following the inspection the academic program was designed around the twin focus of ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ with two weeks in February devoted to University-based activities for trainees providing sessions constructed around these themes. The course included elements generic to all students through the Educational Professional Studies (EPS) program, and sessions specialized by curricular area. The ‘national priorities’ as well as the Ofsted prescriptions were only specifying the desirable outcome (the development of the competence in student teachers) but were leaving the ‘how to’ decisions to the local team. Our participants decided to use a combination of an ‘infused’ and a ‘separated’ design, where inclusion and diversity were addressed both through explicit stand-alone activities, as well as through more a more embedded approach where these concepts here directly connected to curriculum, policy and pedagogy (DeLuca, 2012:553). Through theoretical and practical sessions and readings the aim was to get student teachers to reflect on these

concepts, to understand what they mean within and out of the classroom context, and to ‘begin to integrate them within their particular subject teaching plans’ (*Anna*).

Our interviews with staff and students suggest that the way the course was organized achieved to a large degree the coherence needed between the various elements of the program in order to integrate theory and practice in promoting inclusive pedagogies and lesson planning. This coherence between course elements provided one of the key foci of the workshops organized by the PGCE team, that introduced model teaching (teacher educator-led sessions), students working in groups on research tasks, producing poster presentations, ‘sharing best trainee practice’, and hosting invited presentations from teachers in a local school. In most of these events, framework documents were the starting point (the QTS standards), but additional material and interactive on-line sites were also used. These on-site sessions that linked coursework and conventional teaching activities were combined with attempts to build these elements into the field-practice that took place in the first part of the teaching year.

Professional understanding of local needs

One theme that has emerged in our interviews with teacher educators concerns the relationship of the University with the local community. This has two dimensions: one relates to the local partner schools, and the second and closely related one, refers to the local population and their particular characteristics:

The Teacher Development Agency tells us what the national priorities are ... But we also know that within our partnership there is a need on things like cultural diversity and inclusion because of the nature of the schools we teach in, and the population of those schools... We build it explicitly into the EPS program. (*Alex*)

The interpretation of this ‘local need’ by the course team draws on strong discourses of professional and institutional identity: the functions that the teacher education course is seen to perform are defined by the particular understandings of responsibility to cater to the local population of students, and the needs of the partner-schools. The nature of the relationships of the course with these two constituencies is defined by notions of professional ethics and experience, but these are framed by the national priorities as well as inspections.

Market pressures and performativity

In addition to the explicit regulatory frames of Ofsted and TDA, our data suggests that the less explicit environment of the education market is a further dimension influencing the structuring of the program. In combination with the inspections requirements, the market provides a powerful set of incentives to which local schools respond to, and, the PGCE course takes into account. The change of the nature and purpose of assessment in schools because of the drive that schools have to produce data (partly for inspection purposes and partly for the publication of league tables) has serious implications for the ways in which pedagogy is organized within schools. The mechanistic approach to setting and marking school assessment shapes the ways in which schools set targets of achievement for individual pupils:

Ofsted say “that’s the grades from KS2⁴, so we expect pupils to achieve an improvement of two levels”... if they don’t, the school is failing. Then you get to KS4 and they’re asking “how do we get grades Cs and above?” and for pupils who can’t possibly get there, why waste resources on them? ... you’re playing to the external audience with the league tables and everything. All too often you see a lot of investment around the C-D boundary. (*Alex*).

This is a process familiar to the trainees from their own school years, and from what they experience in their school placements. The very weakest academically pupils (the ones predicted to achieve below D grade) are neglected since any additional investment in their progress is not seen likely to produce visible effects for the school. This ‘perverse incentive’ that schools have to shape their pedagogy around ‘ability groups’ of pupils as identified by their earlier exam results, presents teacher educators with particular difficulties that relate directly to definitions of ‘inclusivity’ (*Jean*).

Strategies and interpretations

When asked to define ‘inclusion’ most interview participants provided similar answers to do with the ‘right to learning’ (‘Every teacher should know and accept as an absolute premise, that every child in their classroom, regardless of gender, faith, cultural background, social and economic class has a right to learn’ *Ken*). But, when discussing the conditions necessary to make this general statement a reality, and the strategies that teacher educators use to guide trainees towards it, the responses reveal different conceptions of inclusion. These conceptions are also drawing on ideas about pedagogy and good teaching, and views of teaching in relationship to pupil’s ability, both of these framed by the official definitions emerging from the government and the inspectorate.

Our research participants use three working definitions of inclusion that have implications for the strategies used with the student teachers throughout their training year: inclusion in relation to ability, inclusion as promoting diversity and, inclusion as an academic process.

Inclusion in relation to ability

This interpretation of inclusion represents one of the more formal ways of defining the concept used within the teacher education course. The focus here is on the policy documents as these identify what needs to be covered, but it also reflects the institutional arrangements around ‘inclusion’ in the partnership schools. Staff interviews suggest that inclusion is now “framed in terms of personalization, individualization, in other words every child making progress” (*Anna*). In this approach that reflects the Ofsted definitions of inclusion as well as the OECD one presented earlier, it is viewed as a rather narrow guiding concept related to ability: ‘In some schools you’ll have an inclusion unit for people with special needs. In other schools you’ll have an inclusion unit for behaviour management. Inclusion is mainly about ability’ (*Anna*).

⁴ This is the legal term for the four years of schooling known as Years 3, 4, 5, 6, when pupils are aged 7-11. *Key Stage 3* covers ages 11-14, and *Key Stage 4* ages 14-16.

In many of the partnership schools inclusion is seen primarily in connection to pupils of a perceived low ability and/or disruptive behavior. Often, inclusion is talked about as *something you can organize* in stand-alone units or for small groups of pupils who are taken out of the normal classroom activities (*Jean*). There are common practices within schools of ‘withdrawal rooms’ and ‘time out areas’ that are used primarily for disciplining purposes. In some of the schools the time that pupils are expected to spend in these areas is considerable, so they also serve as spaces for work under the supervision of teaching assistants (*Ken, Carl*). In addition, almost all the partnership schools have an Inclusion Unit usually designed for pupils with learning difficulties and special needs education statements, but often, as in the example below, used in connection to behavior management:

(The Inclusion Unit) is an area of the school dedicated to the excellent practice of restoring students’ self-confidence and resolving their distress or anger. The policy of the Unit is to reintegrate students at the earliest opportunity so that they feel included in their original lessons. The Unit is also the base for a small number of students who follow a work related learning programme during KS4 (Partnership school documentation).

Spatially separating individuals or groups of pupils from the mainstream activities is only one aspect of this definition of inclusion as linked to ability. Staff and students report that many of the partnership schools have similar approaches to adjusting the curriculum and assessment. In one school for example, this is done in small ‘nurture groups’ where pupils with weak literacy are offered ‘booster sessions’ outside of the normal lessons. In another school the Science curriculum for 14 year olds is adjusted, and ‘pupils who wouldn’t cope’ are offered ‘alternatives to the more academic curriculum’ and the more challenging assessment. Despite the claims around ‘individualization’, pupils located in high ability bands are not talked about in relation to inclusion. This is a discourse reserved for the ‘problem’ pupils, both in documents (including student essays), and in interviews.

The implications of this narrow view of inclusion for the teacher education program are reflected in the EPS core program that presents to trainees the framework of government policies through lectures and mirrors the official definitions of inclusion in the practical elements of the course. Trainees are encouraged to reflect in their written work on the difficulties on practicing inclusion, although not necessarily on challenging the policy context, or the structures and practices that students encounter in partnership schools. They are also encouraged to think about the nature of their subject as an academic discipline as well as a teaching subject (*Anna*), and are guided in the theory and practice of differentiating teaching by ability – another explicit requirement by the inspectorate and routinely used in schools (*Richard, Ken*).

Inclusion as diversity

This interpretation of inclusion is the second source of ‘official’ definitions of the concept and draws on old-fashioned discourses of multiculturalism. It represents the views of Ofsted, but is also a widespread conception of inclusivity across mainly trainees, and to a lesser extent staff. It tends to emphasize the celebration of cultural difference and features highly in terms of visual representations. This conception is one of the most challenging aspects of a course that aims to

construct a teacher education program around principles of social justice. It is ideologically problematic and strongly promoted by the inspectors as the basis upon which teaching practice should be modelled. The examples below come from the subject of Physics but they are typical of what was presented to us from all the other science subjects:

One of the lessons picked on (by Ofsted) as *not* showing diversity was a lesson on energy, in Physics. Well, there isn't any cultural diversity in electric circuits, to which Ofsted said "there is lots of cultural diversity". So, we have had to put in all our lesson plans stuff about cultural diversity... and we have added a box on our performance sheet asking the trainees "where have you included social and cultural diversity?" (*Richard*)

In complying with the prescriptions of Ofsted, the course team had to integrate (often force) the issue of diversity in all activities with the trainees. Predictably, this led to numerous examples of students using 'culture' in teaching sessions and coursework where naïve and essentialist representation of other cultures dominate, with few exceptions where 'diversity' themes draw on differential use of resources and wealth between the South and the North. The examples below illustrate student activities reflecting both the naïve approach, and the positions that have more critical potential – with, as expected, the former being much more representative across the work of the 45 students of our research:

One trainee was teaching "seasons of the year" and the "day and night", and he started by having some Native American music and some PowerPoint about Native Americans worshipping the planets and the sun ... We also had another student who included cultural diversity into his "energy" lesson by finishing with a PowerPoint showing the earth from space, and you could see where all the energy is produced, and when he focused on Africa,... it was dark apart from Cape Town (*Richard*)

Such practices promote racialized constructions of 'otherness' (Shain, 2013:64) as exotic or primitive (as in the example here), and reinforce stereotypes of difference and inferiority. Even though the teacher educators themselves did not articulate this view of inclusivity, the structure of a lot of the sessions did include examples of such work, as required by the explicit Ofsted recommendations.

Inclusion as an academic process

This represents the most strongly held interpretation of inclusion within the group of teacher educators. It brings together conceptions about pupils' different abilities, curriculum and assessment and the right pedagogy to be adopted in order to 'ensure that children are presented with the best possible opportunities to learn and therefore it's looking at the barriers to learning and how they may be broken down' (*Carl*). The strategies in place to achieve this form of inclusion as progress for individual pupils, are summarized under (a) appropriate differentiation strategies within subject teaching, and (b) the promotion of 'good teaching' principles that trainees are encouraged to adopt and adapt according to the needs of specific groups of pupils.

Differentiation – The practice of differentiating curriculum material and teaching tasks by ability of pupils is not contested in our study, and it is strongly promoted by Ofsted. Despite research documenting adverse effects on the pupils classified as 'lower ability' in terms of

future performance, self-esteem, and attitudes to school, (Hallam & Ireson, 2007) but also equitable classroom relations (Boaler, 2008), differentiation is an established practice within English secondary schools and teacher education providers. This is reflected in our data, where differentiation is viewed positively and taught to trainees in science as the optimal way to meet the diverse needs of the pupils in their various ability bands. There is also a strong awareness of the links between differentiating by ability, and restricting potential. In the quote below, Jake elaborates a view of differentiation that requires from the trainees a sophisticated approach to pedagogy that takes into account the intellectual demands the curriculum places on pupils, the support needed to pupils of different perceived abilities, and the need to construct the lesson plans following a process of ‘scaffolding’:

Trainees must be planning for the most able students ... an example of a learning outcome: “Use the particle model of matter to explain why sounds cannot travel through a vacuum and why the speed of sound works through various mediums” – by the end of this lesson, you should be able to do that by using the particle model. That’s a high level goal. If you’re doing that at a lower level, your outcome would be to recall that sound cannot travel through vacuum. No application of higher knowledge or explanation. That’s what you would expect from your lower ability, but then again if you’ve not planned lessons to include that, how are you giving your lower ability the chance to prove they can do it? (*Jake*)

This is a challenging process that cannot be perfected within the training year, and it likely that it spans the first few years of the student-teachers’ development (*Carl, Richard*). The problem with a less effective differentiated pedagogy is that it can result in an impoverished curriculum accompanied by low expectations, to the pupils who need the most support, and intellectual engagement. At the same time, the process can be problematic for the higher ability groups. The work of Boaler et.al. (2000) has provided evidence of ‘curriculum polarisation’ through ability groupings, with lower set pupils experiencing restricted learning opportunities, while for certain pupils in the top sets the pace and content of the material was too much to handle. As our participants also report, the more limited curriculum and assessment aimed at the lower sets of pupils, is deeply ingrained in the practices of many partnership schools, and supported by the language of ‘individualization’ as well as Ofsted. The emphasis amongst teacher educators in our study was on improving the way differentiation was planned for and ‘trying to expose trainees to the complexities of the task’ (*Jake*) rather than challenging the core principle that underpins it.

Inclusion and good teaching - There are certain core features of defining what constitutes ‘good teaching’ that provide links to specific views of inclusion as an academic process. Our participants accept that to some extent good teaching as driven by learning outcomes, but there is the acknowledgement that this can be a sterile view of the relationship between teaching and learning. Instead, they frame good teaching around the links between pedagogy, assessment and professional judgment. Assessment is seen as the most problematic element of the relationship, since, within a context of performativity and narrowly-conceived instrumental testing, ‘assessment’ can lose its capacity to act as productive ‘feedback’ (*Rick, Jennifer, Ken*). Through modelling of teaching sessions, but also during the key lectures (mainly on *English as an Additional Language (EAL)*, and *Special Education*), the course team promotes teaching characteristics that aim at:

- (a) Gradual independence of the trainees from tutors, and application of modelled learning situations to their own placement classrooms – this is also viewed as a principle for the trainees to develop with their own pupils;
- (b) Application of knowledge of practice (eg. in relation to performing science experiments, or dealing with classrooms that have high numbers of pupils with EAL) to different learning contexts;
- (c) Emphasizing seemingly simple principles of good teaching that are often the product of long teaching experience. Such principles (summarized by Jean and Rick as: ‘making small adjustments’) include: placing new teaching into context and connecting with earlier materials, using visual aids in classrooms, giving clear instructions and explanations, frequent repetitions and recapping so that the weakest pupils can ‘catch up’ and adjusting the pace of sessions to what pupils can do, constant reinforcement of newly acquired concepts, use of appropriate language in classrooms, and use of praise for even small achievements.

Many of these features of ‘good teaching’ are illustrated through practical sessions, but they are explicitly presented as necessary principles when teachers are dealing with learners who have a learning difficulty, and as core issues when constructing inclusive pedagogies. As the special educator tutor says, ‘What is good teaching for SEN children, is good teaching for all children’ (*Jean, Lecture*).

Discussion

Our findings raise two important issues in relation to teacher education and inclusion. First, teacher education can act as an important agency in achieving inclusion within classrooms. But, it is naïve to think that it can work against a policy framework that promotes a limited pedagogical understanding of inclusion, where pedagogy and inclusion are incorporated into “a policy discourse characterized by deficit assumptions” for different categories of learners (Smyth et.al., 2008:81). In our case study, it was clear that categorizing learners by ability (and sometimes by behavior) was well integrated and systematically promoted as the basis of pedagogy, by Ofsted, the partnership schools linked to the course, and by the course team that had long experience of collaborative interactions with local schools based on such practices. In turn, these local practices of pedagogic differentiation are shaped by the demands of testing and league tables that seem to control what is possible in terms of classroom practice. It is much easier to promote conceptions and practices around *inclusion as linked to (low) ability*, and, *inclusion as diversity* drawing on simplistic (and potentially dangerous) notions of cultural otherness. The more demanding practice of *inclusion as academic process* requires significantly more investment in producing intellectually challenging content for diverse pupils, and in drawing on pedagogies that provide pupils with opportunities to develop social and academic identities as well as using ‘difference’ as a resource. Pedagogies of differentiation are clearly promoted by our participants (staff and student) as such a resource that, if used well, can produce real opportunities for academic progress. But, when seen against the reported practices from schools that concentrate attention to pupils within particular grade bands we suggest that a possible outcome of differentiation in practice produces what Thomson et.al. (2010:651) call ‘pedagogies of under-attainment’.

Our second observation relates to the ways in which the teacher education program incorporates the requirement for inclusion. Even though inclusion is talked about as *an integral part of what we do* it had to be grafted onto the course as a distinct set of activities. Inclusion is seen primarily as removing barriers to participation and learning for all pupils, and many of the teaching sessions we observed and student essays we read emphasized the *principles of good teaching as inclusive teaching*. Students are invited to reflect on what these mean in the classroom contexts they encounter, and what are difficulties in applying such principles when faced with school structures that are not necessarily supporting them. However, in the intersection between principles, reflection and actual experiences in schools some of the good intentions of integrating principles of inclusive pedagogy get lost. Following the Ofsted explicit requirement to ‘add inclusion and diversity’ into every teaching session and performance sheet, has resulted in frustration by staff and students in having to force the issue even when it is not deemed appropriate. When the principle of inclusivity is an ‘added on’ framework (set of materials, teaching sessions, activities), its pedagogic potential is lost, and its capacity to be truly integrated into the course is diminished. In the worst cases, our interview data suggest, it can have the perverse effect of reinforcing cultural stereotypes about diversity.

These two issues, are connected. The logics of contemporary education policy in England shape the practices of both schools and teacher education providers along the lines of differentiated pedagogies and highly performative and competitive school cultures. In such context, the transformative cultures needed for an inclusive pedagogy are not supported. Despite the numerous positive examples of preparing new teachers for good (inclusive) teaching through lectures and model teaching, inclusion can remain at the level of abstract principles, and struggle to filter through to practice in the classroom context. We argue that a degree of optimism is possible to retain. The teacher educators in our case study initiate future teachers to discourses of productive pedagogies. However difficult the encounters may be with policy texts and school contexts, such discourses can generate ‘communities of learners’ that develop ‘an understanding of the values and practices of student populations that may be very different to their own, and construct a pedagogy that takes into account locally appropriate and culturally sensitive ways’ (Cochran-Smith, 2004: 46).

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