

## **Developing Inclusive Education Systems: What are the Levers for Change?**

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It is now almost ten years since the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education endorsed the idea of inclusive education. Arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the special needs field, the Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are ‘the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all’. Furthermore, it suggests, such schools can ‘provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system’ (UNESCO, 1994).

During the subsequent ten years or so, there has been considerable activity in many countries to move educational policy and practice in a more inclusive direction. In this paper I use evidence from research carried out over that period in order to consider what needs to be done to build on the progress that has been made so far. In particular, I consider the question: *What are the ‘levers’ that can move education systems in an inclusive direction?*

### **Mapping the field**

As countries have tried to move their education systems in a more inclusive direction, with colleagues I have carried out a programme of research in order to learn from their experiences. This research has focused on: the development of classroom practice (e.g. Ainscow, 1999, 2000; Ainscow & Brown, 2000; Ainscow, Howes, Farrell, & Frankham, 2003); school development (e.g. Ainscow, 1995; Ainscow, Barrs, & Martin, 1998; Booth & Ainscow, 2002); teacher development (e.g. Ainscow, 1994, 2002); and systemic change (e.g. Ainscow & Haile-Giorgis, 1999; Ainscow, Farrell, & Tweddle, 2000), particularly in respect to the role of LEAs (e.g. Ainscow & Howes, 2001; Ainscow & Tweddle, 2003).

Much of our research has involved the use of an approach that we refer to as ‘collaborative inquiry’. This advocates practitioner research, carried out in partnership with academics, as a means of developing better understanding of educational processes (e.g. Ainscow, 1999). Kurt Lewin’s dictum that you cannot understand an organisation until you try to change it is, perhaps, the clearest justification for this approach (Schein, 2001). In practical terms, we believe that such understanding is best developed as a result of ‘outsiders’, such as ourselves, working alongside practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders as they seek practical solutions to the problems they face.

We argue that this approach can be used to overcome the traditional gap between research and practice. Some suggest that educational research *is* directly relevant to issues of practice ‘if only the right people would listen’. What is proposed here is an

alternative view, in line with the formulation made by Robinson (1998). This suggests that research findings may well continue to be ignored, regardless of how well they are communicated, if they bypass the ways in which practitioners formulate the problems they face and the constraints within which they work.

The potential benefits of collaborative inquiry, in which an open dialogue can develop, are considerable. The ideal we aspire to is a process through which critical reflection leads to understandings that can have an immediate and direct impact on the development of thinking and practice in the field. However, it has to be recognised that participatory research of this kind is fraught with difficulties, not least in terms of developing ways of making it happen that lead to findings that have relevance to a wider audience.

Such research leads to detailed examples of how those within particular contexts have attempted to develop inclusive policies and practices. It also provides frameworks and propositions that can be used by those within other contexts to analyse their own working contexts. One such framework provides a useful map for the argument I develop in this paper (see Figure 1). It is intended to help us focus on factors that bear on inclusive developments within an education system. More specifically, it focuses our attention on possible levers that can help to move the system forward.

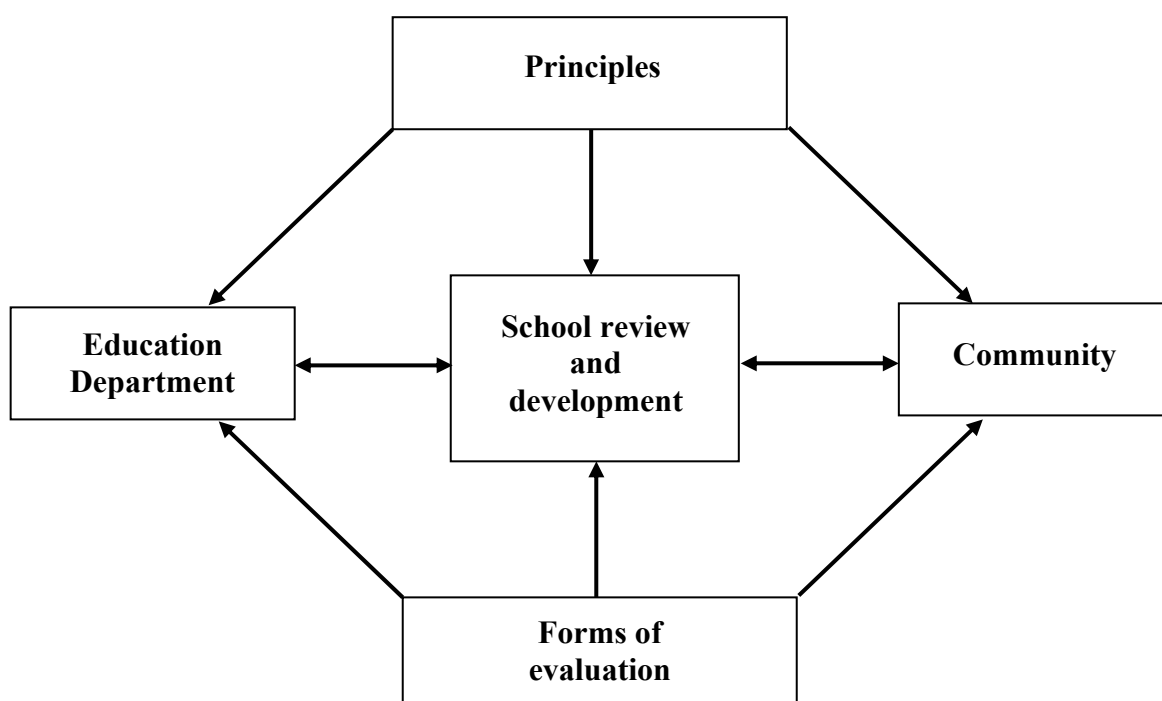


Figure 1: Levers for change

Senge (1989) sees 'levers' as actions that can be taken in order to change the behaviour of an organisation and those individuals within it. He goes on to argue that those who wish to encourage change within an organisation must be smart in determining where the high leverage lies. Too often, he suggests, approaches used to bring about large-scale changes in organisations are 'low leverage'. That is to say, they tend to change the way things look but not the way they work. Possible examples of low leverage activity in the education field include: the production of

policy documents, conferences and in-service courses. Whilst such initiatives may make a contribution, by and large they do not lead to significant changes in thinking and practice. Our aim, therefore, must be to identify what may turn out to be more subtle, less obvious and higher leverage efforts to bring about change in schools.

The framework places schools at the centre of the analysis. This reinforces the point that moves towards inclusion must focus on increasing the capacity of local neighbourhood schools to support the participation and learning of an increasingly diverse range of learners. This is the paradigm shift implied by the Salamanca Statement. It sees moves towards inclusion as being about the development of schools, rather than attempts to include vulnerable groups of students into existing arrangements. It is, therefore, essentially about those within schools developing practices that can 'reach out to all learners' (Ainscow, 1999).

At the same time, the framework draws attention to a range of contextual influences that bear on the way schools carry out their work. As I will explain, these influences may provide support and encouragement to those in schools who are wishing to move in an inclusive direction. At the same time, it also draws our attention to how the same factors can act as barriers to progress.

These influences relate to the principles that guide policy priorities within an education system; the views and actions of others within the local context, including members of the wider community that the school serves; the staff of the departments that have responsibility for the administration of the school; and the criteria that are used to evaluate the performance of schools.

In what follows I examine these wider influences in more detail. Before doing so, however, I will summarise what our research suggests about the way inclusive developments can be encouraged within schools.

### **Developing inclusive practices**

We have recently completed a three-year study that has attempted to throw further light on what needs to happen in order to develop inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow et al, 2003). The study involved teams from three universities working with groups of schools as they attempted to move practice forward. It led us to conclude that the development of inclusive practice is not about adopting new technologies of the sort described in some of the existing literature (e.g. Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Thousand & Villa, 1991; Wang, 1991; Sebba & Sachdev, 1997; Florian, Rose, & Tilstone, 1998). Rather, it involves social learning processes that occur within a given workplace. This led us to interrogate our evidence in order to seek a deeper understanding of what these processes involve. To assist in this analysis we used as our guide the idea of 'communities of practice', as developed by Etienne Wenger (1998), focusing specifically on the way he sees learning as 'a characteristic of practice'.

Although the words 'community' and 'practice' evoke common images, Wenger has particular definitions of these terms, giving the phrase 'community of practice' a distinctive meaning. A practice, for example, need not be framed as the work and skill of a particular practitioner. Rather, a practice consists of those things that individuals in a community do, drawing on available resources, to further a set of shared goals. This goes beyond how practitioners complete their tasks, to include,

for example, how they make it through the day, commiserating about the pressures and constraints within which they have to operate.

Wenger provides a framework that can be used to analyse learning in social contexts. At the centre of this framework is the concept of a 'community of practice', a social group engaged in the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Practices are ways of negotiating meaning through social action. In Wenger's view, meaning arises from two complementary processes, 'participation' and 'reification'. He notes:

Practices evolve as shared histories of learning. History in this sense is neither merely a personal or collective experience, nor just a set of enduring artefacts and institutions, but a combination of participation and reification over time. (p. 87)

In this formulation, participation is seen as the shared experiences and negotiations that result from social interaction within a purposive community. Participation is thus inherently local, since shared experiences and negotiation processes will differ from one setting to the next, regardless of their interconnections. So, for example, within schools in our study we saw how hours of meetings, shared experiences and informal discussions over hurriedly taken lunches, also involved the development of particular meanings of frequently used phrases such as 'raising standards' and 'inclusion'. These shared meanings help to define a teacher's experience of being a teacher. In the same way we can assume that groups of colleagues doing similar work in another school have their own shared histories that give meaning to being a teacher in that particular context.

Reification is the process by which communities of practice produce concrete representations of their practices, such as tools, symbols, rules and documents (and even concepts and theories). So, for example, documents such as the school development plan or behaviour policy, are reifications of the practice of teachers. They include representations of the activities in which teachers engage, and some illustrations of the conditions and problems that a teacher might encounter in practice. At the same time, it is important to remember that such documents often provide overly rationalized portrayals of ideal practice in which the challenges and uncertainties of unfolding action are smoothed over in the telling (Brown & Duguid, 1991)

Wenger argues that learning within a given community can often be best explained within the intertwining of reification and participation. He suggests that these are complementary processes, in that each has the capacity to repair the ambiguity of meaning the other can engender. So, for example, a particular strategy may be developed as part of a school's planning activities and summarised in a set of guidance for action, providing a codified reification of intended practice. However, the meaning and practical implications of the strategy only becomes clear as it is tried in the field and discussed between colleagues. In this way, participation results in social learning that could not be produced solely by reification alone. At the same time, the reified products, such as policy documents, serve as a kind of memory of practice, cementing in place the new learning. Such an analysis provides a way of describing the means by which practices develop within a school.

At this stage in the argument it is important to stress that I am not suggesting that communities of practice are in themselves a panacea for the development of inclusive practices. Rather, the concept helps us to attend to and make sense of the significance of social process of learning as powerful mediators of meaning. Wenger notes:

"Communities of practice are not intrinsically beneficial or harmful.... Yet they are a force to be reckoned with, for better or for worse. As a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relationships, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, such communities hold the key to real transformation - the kind that has real effect on people's lives... The influence of other forces (e.g. the control of an institution or the authority of an individual) are no less important, but... they are mediated by the communities in which their meanings are negotiated in practice" (ibid. p. 85).

The methodology for developing inclusive practices must, therefore, take account of these social processes of learning that go on within particular contexts. It requires a group of stakeholders within a particular context to look for a common agenda to guide their enquiries and, at much the same time, a series of struggles to establish ways of working that enable them to collect and find meaning in different types of information. The notion of the community of practice is a significant reminder of how this meaning is made.

Similarly important is the development of a common language with which colleagues can talk to one another and indeed to themselves about detailed aspects of their practice (Huberman, 1993; Little & McLaughlin, 1993). It seems, moreover, that without such a language teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities. It has been noted, for example, that when researchers report to teachers what has been observed during their lessons they will often express surprise (Ainscow, 1999). It seems that much of what teachers do during the intensive encounters that occur in a typical lesson is carried out at an automatic, intuitive level, involving the use of tacit knowledge. Furthermore there is little time to stop and think. This is perhaps why having the opportunity to see colleagues at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop practice. It is through such shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do. It is also the means whereby taken-for-granted assumptions about particular groups of students can be subjected to mutual critique.

Our research has drawn attention to certain ways of engaging with evidence that seem to be helpful in encouraging such dialogue and through which anomalies can be identified. Our observation is that these can help to create space for reappraisal and rethinking by interrupting existing discourses, and by focusing attention on overlooked possibilities for moving practice forward. These approaches involve:

- Surveys of staff, student and parent views;
- Mutual observation of classroom practices, followed by structured discussion of what happened;
- Group discussion of a video recording of one colleague teaching;
- Discussion of statistical evidence regarding test results, attendance registers or exclusion records;
- Data from interviews with pupils;
- Staff development exercises based on case study material or interview data; and
- School to school cooperation, including mutual visits to help collect evidence.

Particularly powerful in this respect have been what we have called 'alternatives'; that is, practical demonstrations of different ways of working which teachers have accessed through visiting each others schools, or through having consultants come in

and work with their classes (Dyson & Ainscow, 2003). The power of these alternatives seems to lie less in the 'good ideas' which they offer than in the way they take a familiar situation (such as the teacher's of classroom) and challenge the teacher's assumptions about the way that situation has to be. Under certain conditions, therefore, all of these approaches can provide 'interruptions' that help to 'make the familiar unfamiliar' in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action. Here, the role of the headteacher is crucial, for Lambert and her colleagues seem to be talking about a similar process in their discussion of what they call 'the constructivist leader'. They stress the importance of leaders gathering, generating and interpreting information within a school in order to create an 'inquiring stance'. They argue that such information causes 'disequilibrium' in thinking and, as a result, provides a challenge to existing assumptions about teaching and learning (Lambert et al., 1995).

We have found that these kinds of actions may create space and encourage discussion. However, they are not in themselves straightforward mechanisms for the development of more inclusive practices. The space that is created may be filled according to conflicting agendas. In this way, deeply held beliefs within a school may prevent the experimentation that is necessary in order to foster the development of more inclusive ways of working. So, for example, at the end of a lesson in a secondary school during which there was a very low level of participation amongst the class, the teacher explained to one of us what had happened with reference to the fact that most of the class were listed on the school's special educational needs register.

Such explanations make us acutely aware that the relationship between the recognition of anomalies in school practices and the presence of students presenting difficulties as the occasions for such recognition is deeply ambiguous. It is very easy for educational difficulties to be pathologised as difficulties inherent *in* students, even when those same difficulties are used productively to interrogate some aspects of school practice. This is true not only of students with disabilities and those defined as 'having special educational needs', but also of those whose socioeconomic status, race, language and gender renders them problematic to particular teachers in particular schools. Consequently, it is necessary, I suggest, to develop the capacity of those within schools to reveal and challenge deeply entrenched deficit views of 'difference', which define certain types of students as 'lacking something' (Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998).

Specifically, it is necessary to be vigilant in scrutinising how deficit assumptions may be influencing perceptions of certain students. As Bartolome (1994) explains, teaching methods are neither devised nor implemented in a vacuum. Design, selection and use of particular teaching approaches and strategies arise from perceptions about learning and learners. In this respect even the most pedagogically advanced methods are likely to be ineffective in the hands of those who implicitly or explicitly subscribe to a belief system that regards some students, at best, as disadvantaged and in need of fixing, or, worse, as deficient and, therefore, beyond fixing.

### **The wider context**

So far I have focused on factors within schools that can act as 'levers for change'. However, our experience suggests that developments within individual schools are more likely to lead to sustainable development if they are part of a process of systemic change. In other words, inclusive school development has to be seen in relation to wider factors that may help or hinder progress. The first of these factors relates to

the overall policy context in which schools must operate. Here a particularly important factor relates to the extent to which inclusion is understood as a guiding principle.

In my own country, there is still considerable confusion about what ‘inclusion’ actually means (Ainscow et al., 2000). To some extent, this lack of clarity might be tracked back to central Government policy statements. For example, the use of the term ‘social inclusion’ has been associated mainly with improving attendance and reducing the incidence of exclusions from schools. At the same time, the idea of ‘inclusive education’ has appeared in most national guidance in connection with the rights of individual children and young people categorised as having special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools, whenever possible. Most recently, Ofsted, the inspection agency, has introduced the term ‘educational inclusion’, noting that ‘effective schools are inclusive schools’. The subtle differences between these concepts adds to the sense of uncertainty as to what is intended and, of course, it is now well established that educational reform is particularly difficult in contexts where there is a lack of common understanding amongst stakeholders (e.g. Fullan, 1991).

This being the case, in our own work we have supported a number of English LEAs as they have attempted to develop a definition of ‘inclusion’ that can be used to guide policy development. Predictably, the exact detail of each LEA’s definition is unique, because of the need to take account of local circumstances, culture and history. Nevertheless, four key elements have tended to feature strongly, and these are commended to those in any education system who are intending to review their own working definition. The four elements are as follows:

- *Inclusion is a process.* That is to say, inclusion has to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference, and, learning how to learn from difference. In this way differences come to be seen more positively as a stimulus for fostering learning, amongst children and adults.
- *Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers.* Consequently, it involves collecting, collating and evaluating information from a wide variety of sources in order to plan for improvements in policy and practice. It is about using evidence of various kinds to stimulate creativity and problem-solving,
- *Inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students.* Here ‘presence’ is concerned where children are educated, and how reliably and punctually they attend; ‘participation’ relates to the quality of their experiences whilst they are there and, therefore, incorporates the views of the learners themselves; and ‘achievement’ is about the outcomes of learning across the curriculum, not merely test or examination results.
- *Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement.* This indicates the moral responsibility to ensure that those groups that are statistically most ‘at risk’ are carefully monitored, and that, where necessary, steps are taken to ensure their presence, participation and achievement in the education system.

Our experience has been that a well-orchestrated debate about these elements can lead to a wider understanding of the principle of inclusion within a community. We are

also finding that such a debate, though by its nature slow and, possibly, never ending, can have leverage in respect to fostering the conditions within which schools can feel encouraged to move in a more inclusive direction. Such a debate must involve all stakeholders within the local community. It must also involve those within the local education district.

Through our work, then, we have tried to ‘map’ factors at the district level that have the potential to either facilitate or inhibit the promotion of inclusive practices in schools. These are all ‘variables’ which education departments either control directly, or over which they can at least exert considerable influence. We intend that this work will eventually lead to the development of a framework instrument that will provide a basis for self-review processes. With this in mind, there follows our working list of twelve factors, each with a small number of associated questions.

1. *Definition.* For example: Is there clarity about what is meant by ‘inclusion’? Is this definition short, clear, and widely understood? Is it widely supported by key stakeholders within and beyond the education district?
2. *Leadership.* For example: Is there effective management from senior management and politicians on inclusion issues? Does this include articulating a clear and consistent vision to the wider educational community? Does it include recognising and celebrating good practice, and challenging unacceptable practice?
3. *Attitudes.* For example: Is the education department a positive, solution-focussed organisation that is fully committed to identifying and removing barriers to promoting inclusion in schools?
4. *Policies, planning and processes.* For example: Does the education department’s definition of, and commitment to, inclusion ‘permeate’ all of its self-review, and strategic planning, processes?
5. *Structures, roles and responsibilities.* For example: Does the structure of the education department facilitate effective support and challenge to schools on inclusion issues? Do all units and services understand their contribution to this aim and work effectively together to provide a coherent and co-ordinated service to schools?
6. *Funding.* For example: Are the mechanisms used for distributing available resources designed to empower individual schools, and groups of schools, to identify and overcome barriers to presence, participation and achievement?
7. *Support and challenge to schools.* For example: Do schools understand the policy aspirations for the development of inclusive education? Does the education department facilitate systems of school-to-school support and challenge?
8. *Responding to diversity.* For example: Does the education department encourage and facilitate the development of additional programmes, curriculum initiatives and other provision in *all* schools that are designed to reduce the risk of underachievement, marginalisation and exclusion?
9. *Specialist provision.* For example: Is there is a clear role for other specialist provision, including special schools, that supports the education department’s commitment to promoting inclusion?
10. *Partnerships.* For example: Is there a strong partnership between the education department and its schools that is characterised by a shared commitment to, and effective communication about, the principle of inclusion?

Is there effective co-operation with Health and other Departments, on inclusion?

11. *Use of evidence.* For example: Are there clear success criteria that are linked directly to its definition of inclusion? Is evidence collected by the education department, and by individual schools, that can be used to evaluate progress towards more inclusive practice? Does this evidence include the views of pupils and their families about the services they receive?
12. *Staff development and training.* For example: Is there a properly funded Staff Development and Training Strategy that: recognises the importance of continued professional development; and ensures that all of its members of staff are provided with awareness raising and role-specific training opportunities on inclusion issues.

Some of these twelve factors seem to be potentially more potent than others. However, our research suggests that two factors seem to be superordinate to all others, namely clarity of definition and the forms of evidence that are used to measure educational performance.

Our search for ‘levers’ has led us to acknowledge the importance of evidence. In essence, it leads us to conclude that within the English education system, at least, ‘what gets measured gets done’. Nowadays, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England are required to collect far more statistical data than ever before. This is widely recognised as a double-edged sword precisely because it is such a potent lever for change. On the one hand, data are required in order to monitor the progress of children, evaluate the impact of interventions, review the effectiveness of policies and processes, plan new initiatives, and so on. In these senses, data can, justifiably, be seen as the life-blood of continuous improvement. On the other hand, if effectiveness is evaluated on the basis of narrow, even inappropriate, performance indicators, then the impact can be deeply damaging. Whilst appearing to promote the causes of accountability and transparency, the use of data can, in practice: conceal more than they reveal; invite misinterpretation; and, worse of all, have a perverse effect on the behaviour of professionals. This has led the current ‘*audit culture*’ to be described as a ‘*tyranny of transparency*’ (Strathern, 2000).

All of this suggests that great care needs to be exercised in deciding what evidence is collected and, indeed, how it is used. English LEAs are required by Government to collect particular data. Given national policies they cannot opt out of collecting such data on the grounds that their publication might be misinterpreted, or that they may influence practice in an unhelpful way. On the other hand, LEAs are free to collect additional evidence that can then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of their own policy and practice in respect to progress towards greater inclusion. The challenge for LEAs is, therefore, to harness the potential of evidence as a lever for change, whilst avoiding the problems described earlier.

Our own work suggests that the starting point for making decisions about the evidence to collect should be with an agreed definition of inclusion. In line with the suggestions made earlier, then, we argue that the evidence collected at the district level needs to relate to the ‘presence, participation and achievement’ of all students, with an emphasis placed on those groups of learners regarded to be ‘at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement’.

### **Inter-dependence**

I recently listened to the Chief Education Officer in an English LEA addressing a conference of school principals. In his speech, he talked in particular about the evolving relationship between schools and the LEA. He began by describing the work of LEAs twenty years ago, explaining that at that time the relationship of their relationship with schools was characterised by *dependency*. Indeed, schools depended on the LEA for just about everything – curriculum policies, the replacement of staff, repairs, ‘capitation’, support services, and so on. However, much of the legislation of the last fifteen years has been geared towards giving schools much greater *independence*. That is, independence from the LEA, and indeed independence from one other. Both approaches, he argued, were deeply flawed and should, therefore, be abandoned. In particular, an emphasis on school autonomy within an environment that is preoccupied with competition and choice is unlikely to foster progress in respect to equity. Rather, it creates a policy context within which the success of one school, or, indeed, one group of students, is achieved at the expense of the failure of others. What is needed, therefore, is a shift towards the notion of *inter-dependence*.

This analysis crystallises much of what we are trying to do in our own work. Whilst there is strong research support for the idea of individual schools having the space and resources to plan their own improvement strategies (e.g. Hopkins et al., 1994), it is increasingly being recognised that they are likely to be better placed to make progress if they have access to ‘effective’ forms of support and challenge, both from the LEA and from neighbouring schools. There is, for example, an increasing body of evidence pointing to the benefits of peer support and challenge at the level of individual schools (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2003). Using this approach, where colleagues from one school become involved with colleagues in another school, seems to have the potential to foster learning for both visitors and the visited. The school being visited benefits from the new perspectives and reflections brought by a ‘fresh pair of eyes’; and the visitor takes away insights and ideas derived from looking at how another school carries out its tasks.

This leads me to argue that the approach may have considerable potential for developing policy and practice at a systemic level, although this is as yet largely untested. In other words, I am proposing that education departments should similarly benefit from such an inter-dependent, symbiotic relationship with their schools.

Currently, we are working with a consortium of six LEAs in the North West of England. At the heart of the methodology being used in this initiative is the notion of ‘*peer-supported self-review*’. This involves each individual LEA in planning and managing a self-review process that is focussed on some aspect of policy and practice relating to inclusion. In this way, each LEA is responsible for making judgements about its own practice, and any decisions taken about future developments are made solely by the LEA concerned. However, the process of self-review is supported and challenged by a team of appropriately experienced colleagues from neighbouring LEAs, in addition to ‘outsiders’ from the University.

Introducing such approaches in the current context is far from straight forward. I recall, for example, a meeting I attended some time ago in one particular LEA. It had been called to discuss the logistics of, and the possible benefits and problems

associated with, a proposal to establish clusters or families of schools. In other words, we were planning to put the idea of inter-dependency into action. Eventually, one secondary headteacher, whilst acknowledging that he had enjoyed the debate, said: 'OK, but, what's in this for me and my school'? He went on to argue that the idea would only 'take off' if key stakeholders could see that there would be significant, practical benefits for their own schools or organisations. In other words, he wanted to be convinced that the proposed arrangement would enable his school to move forward.

All of this seems to suggest that self-interest is, in fact, an important component of inter-dependency. Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest that a group of individuals are only likely to develop a sense of inter-dependence when they recognise that 'an event that affects one member affects them all'. It seems, then, that in practice participants need first to understand and then to experience the potential benefits of inter-dependent working arrangements.

The notion of inter-dependency has, of course, a currency beyond the relationship between education departments and schools. Both also have to work with a wide range of other stakeholders. Schools, for example, need to work closely with parents, the local community, and with other statutory and voluntary agencies. They cannot function effectively in isolation. Similarly, education departments need to nurture inter-dependent working relationships with the plethora of other stakeholder groups involved in providing services to children, young people and their families, such as: central government, local politicians, the health department, other local authority services, including social care and housing, the independent sector, and a wide range of community and other voluntary organisations.

In providing this account of the emergence of what I see as a new paradigm for governance based on the development of inter-dependent relationships, I am not laying claim to a major breakthrough in thinking. Certainly in England many of the Government's own policy initiatives in recent years have imposed a requirement on different agencies and stakeholder groups to work together. It is also true that throughout the country there are people from different organisations working together in order to solve problems relating to the education of children and young people.

Nevertheless, the paradigm shift does present major new challenges for senior managers in LEAs. It is clear that local schools are much less dependent on their LEA than they once were; at the same time, local schools cannot function effectively in isolation from their LEA. As our Chief Education Officer colleague was arguing, schools and LEAs are inter-dependent; they need each other. Moreover, I believe that LEAs also need to develop similar, inter-dependent relationship with other LEAs and with other voluntary and statutory agencies providing services to children and their families. All of this points to the need for the development of new cultures, relationships and ways of working.

In our own work, we have been trying to understand the nature of effective inter-dependent relationships. Here we have found Michael Fielding's (1999) distinction between 'collaboration' and 'collegiality' helpful to our thinking. He characterises 'collaboration' as being a means to a clearly defined end. Consequently, it is driven by a set of common concerns, is 'narrowly functional.... focussed strongly on intended gains', and the partners in the activity are regarded as a

resource, or a source of information. Fielding suggests that collaboration is, in a sense, a ‘plural form of individualism’ in which participants are typically ‘intolerant of time spent on anything other than the task in hand or the core purposes of the business’.

Fielding goes on to point out that once the driving force behind collaboration is weakened, the task has been completed or priorities have changed, such collaborative working arrangements may ‘dissipate, disappear or become more tenuous’. ‘Collegiality’, on the other hand, is characterised as being much more robust. It is ‘overridingly communal’ and is rooted in shared ideals, aspirations and ‘valued social ends’. It is, by definition, less reliant upon narrowly defined and predictable gains.

In practice, instances of schools or LEAs working together, or working with other agencies, often do not fall neatly into either definition. Moreover, it may be that, for some combinations of stakeholders, collaboration has to be a forerunner to the growth of collegiality. In other words, stakeholders experience the practical benefits to their organisation of collaborating when the outcomes are clearly defined, whilst seeking to develop a common language and shared aspirations that might, in the longer term, provide a basis for the development of a more collegial relationship.

In our current work, we are trying to nurture collegialities of LEAs working together. Our starting point has been to plan collaborative activity in which the outcomes and benefits are articulated. In the longer term, however, our collective aim is to develop a shared understanding of the nature of inclusion that will provide the basis for self-sustaining collegial relationships.

Our central argument here is that, as the context has changed, so the challenges of strategic management at the district level have to change. Furthermore, we believe that the development and management of inter-dependent working relationships holds the key to effective policy development. Such relationships are the means by which LEAs can work effectively with their schools and with other relevant agencies within the locality, particularly in respect to the issue of inclusion.

### **Looking to the future**

As we have seen, the development of inclusive policies and practices within education systems is complex in a rapidly changing context. This paper is, therefore, an attempt to make a contribution to a better understanding of these complex issues in the field. As such, it is intended that the ideas discussed here will stimulate thinking and debate in ways that will enable further progress to be made in taking forward the inclusion agenda.

As my colleagues and I continue working with the education systems in which we are currently involved, both in England and in other parts of the world, we have two inter-linked aspirations, both of which are inherent in our approach to collaborative research. First, we hope that they will derive direct and practical benefits from their involvement and that, as a result, children, young people and their families will receive more inclusive educational services. Then, in the longer term, we hope that the ‘collaborative’ working arrangements established between participating schools and education departments, (to quote Fielding) will develop ‘collegiate’ relationships, based on a shared understanding of the nature of inclusion.

Secondly, we hope to make further progress in understanding and articulating some of the complex issues involved in this work. In general terms, we intend that the analysis that has been developed will provide the basis of review frameworks, such as the 'Index for Inclusion' (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), for the development of inclusive policies, practices and cultures.

With these aspirations in mind, our current research in England involves LEAs working in partnership to explore the use of peer-supported self-review. In this way, the notion of inter-dependence is being extended to incorporate a district level dimension. The LEAs involved in this study are currently cooperating in a programme of visits, during which they set out to challenge and support one another as they review those policy dimensions that seem to have the potential for high leverage.

It is important to remember that much of what goes on within organisations, such as LEAs and schools, is largely taken-for-granted and, therefore, rarely discussed. In other words, practices are manifestations of organisational culture (Schein, 1985). Our assumption is that some of the barriers experienced by learners arise from these existing arrangements and circumstances. Consequently, the peer supported self-review strategy sets out to use the involvement of 'outsiders' to interrupt existing thinking, in order to encourage 'insiders' to explore overlooked possibilities for moving practice forward. Our research so far indicates that a focus on the issues of definition and the related use of evidence has the potential to create such interruptions.

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