FORUM, Volume 47, Numbers 2 & 3, 2005

Keeping the Future Alive: putting inclusive values into action

TONY BOOTH

ABSTRACT Tony Booth has fought for inclusive education all his life, arguing that the labelling of children as 'having special educational needs' serves to devalue a group and obscure their diversity. It encourages educational difficulties to be seen primarily in terms of the deficiencies of children thus deflecting attention away from the contextual barriers to learning. In reflecting on the struggle for a democratic, participatory practice that values all students and staff equally he re-affirms not only the central importance of socialist values, but also of the language and legacy of the radical progressive tradition that invites us, once again, to understand the importance of 'honesty' and 'joy' as they 'blink hesitantly under the shadow of managerialist absurdities'.

> The more Socialist theories claim to be 'scientific' the more transitory they are; but Socialist values are permanent. The distinction between theories and values is not sufficiently recognized, but it is fundamental. On a group of theories one can found a school [of thought]; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together…
> (Silone, 1950, p. 119).

I have carried around this quotation in my head for more than twenty-five years and have recently tracked down the reference again.[1] It has been one of several props that have reinforced my belief in the centrality of values in developing practice, and a determination to keep in view the values on which my actions are based and those that underlie the actions of others. It has served as a reminder of the moral and political basis of decisions about education. The ways of life in education that are seen as 'effective', 'good' or 'best' practice, or the enactment of 'what works', are not value neutral and may be morally obnoxious, and that matters. What may be justified as necessary, though less than savoury, means to apparently more valued ends, may rapidly become ends in themselves.

When I first set down the quotation I edited out the reference to 'socialism'. I have spent my academic life playing an elaborate game about what words to mention and leave out in my writing. I have felt that to talk overtly about politics in discussing education is to break a taboo, and have chosen the occasions when I have been happy to do that. But I want to make clear that what I call inclusive values, are intimately connected with, and have emerged from my, albeit, idiosyncratic versions of socialist, humanist values. I think that making such a link unites me with others who want to keep alive possibilities for 'new ways of living together'.

But I have deliberately ended the quotation early. I left out the last two words, 'a new way of living together *among men'*. I do not know whether Silone would have felt that an accurate modern translation of his sentiments would be perfectly well served by leaving out these words or, perhaps, by substituting 'people' for 'men'. But certainly, patriarchal forms of organisation are a corruption of socialist or inclusive values. Making my act of omission explicit, serves as a reminder of the frequency with which notions of equity are circumscribed so that one or other group is seen as less than fully human.

Understanding Inclusion

I formulate my approach to inclusion in a number if ways. Inclusion is about increasing participation in, and reducing exclusion from, the curricula, cultures and communities of local education settings. It is about developing education settings so that they are responsive to diversity in a way that values all students and staff equally. I connect this view with support for the development of comprehensive community preschool, school and post-school education and with the very substantial history of ideas about teaching diverse groups within such schools, constantly replenished by the creativity of new generations of teachers and students.

Inclusion in education can be understood, then, within struggles for a democratic, participatory education that analyses and contributes to the continuous development of democracy and participation within society. Among the critical thinkers who have influenced my own ideas on these matters and with whom I link my work, are Homer Lane [2], Margaret McMillan [3], Paolo Freire [4], Eric Fromm [5], Hannah Arrendt [6], Brian Simon [7], Caroline Benn [8], and Susan Hart [9]. Maureen Oswin [10] in her meticulous exposure of the treatment of disabled children in long-stay hospitals, revealed the intellectual as well as moral strengths that are required to know and say what you think and see. I owe to Peter Newell [11]the fixing in my mind of the importance of children's rights and of the clause in the 1986 Education Act that requires head teachers to instill in their students 'a proper regard for authority'. All of the people I have mentioned here have a concern with developing a proper regard for authority, though not the unthinking obedience, that seems to have been envisaged within legislation.

Inclusion is concerned with the participation of all students and their families, and all staff. I cannot see how schools which discourage the participation of staff can have the cultural resources to encourage the participation of children and young people. My approach contrasts with the commonly held view that inclusion is concerned with increasing the participation of children and young people seen to be disabled or categorized as 'having special educational needs'. Such a view limits the participation of even those it claims to serve. For disabled children, are whole people and like other children, face a variety of excluding pressures within education, not just discrimination in relation to their impairment. To treat them as if their participation depends on overcoming only the disabling features of a school, diminishes them as people, since it ignores other aspects of their identities. It is necessary to remind people, too, that the exclusion of disabled people from and within educational institutions affects families and staff and community users of premises as well as school students.

The labeling of children as 'having special educational needs', similarly serves to devalue a whole group and obscure their diversity. It encourages educational difficulties to be seen primarily in terms of the deficiencies of children and so deflects attention from the barriers to learning and participation that may arise in all aspects of a setting, as well as in the pressures acting on it. By attending to the category, we lose sight of its effects, such as the massive over-representation within it, of working class boys.

Increasingly, however, I have emphasised a view of inclusion as a principled approach to education and society, as the task of *putting particular values into action.* If actions to promote inclusion are not related to deeply held values they may represent a fashion statement or the presentation of an image of compliance. I see inclusive values as concerned with issues of *equity, participation, community, compassion, respect for diversity, honesty, rights, joy, and sustainability.* This list is in a state of perpetual development. I think that participation implies *freedom* and the valuing of *achievements* and I have not included these matters separately. But inclusion involves recognition of all the achievements of all within schools, rather than the narrow and distorted notion of achievement within the government's standards agenda.

Of course values are complex, may be disputed and may conflict. As values are elaborated disputes can be brought out into the open. For example, people differ considerably in their tolerance of inequity in status, income and living conditions. 'Participation' is about being with and collaborating with others. It implies active engagement and an involvement in making decisions. It involves recognition and valuing of a variety of identities, so that people are accepted for who they are. I intend a concern with 'community' to reflect the idea that schools and their surrounding communities should mutually sustain each other. It is an encouragement to explore fellow feelings, beyond the family or even the nation state: to critically examine notions of public service, citizenship, global citizenship and the acquisition of an identity that is international. A focus on 'rights' is, similarly, a way of expressing membership of a common humanity. It

includes the recognition that children and young people have rights to a broad education, appropriate support and to attendance at their local school.

Concerns with 'honesty' and 'joy' in education are recent additions to my list as I have increasingly recognised that they cannot be taken for granted. Such thoughts are prompted as I look around in my own institution at faces under the shadow of managerialist absurdities and inspection pressures, or when I have observed children in their final year of primary school, because of pressures of meeting test score targets, working only on maths, English and science without any lessons of music, art or physical education. I see education, and the inclusion of people in it, as about enhancing the human spirit, as about joyful engagement in teaching, learning and relationships.

The idea of sustainability connects inclusion to the most fundamental aim of education: to prepare children and young people for sustainable ways of life within sustainable communities and environments. At a time when global warming is arguably the most important issue affecting everyone on the planet, inclusion must be concerned with permeating within education an understanding of it and responses to it. I call the values that lead the powerful to ignore the environmental degradation that is being handed on to future generations, 'grandchild-murder'.

Values underlie all actions and plans of action, all practices within schools and all policies for the shaping of practice. All actions, practices and policies can be regarded as the embodiment of moral arguments. We cannot do the right thing in education without understanding, at some level, the values from which our actions spring. The development of inclusion, therefore, involves us in making explicit the values that underlie actions, practices and policies, and learning how to better relate our actions to inclusive values. Of course making our values accessible is not unproblematic, nor is this all that is necessary for us to act in accordance with them. We also require knowledge and skills, though the knowledge and skills we need in education, are dependent on the values we wish to put into practice. We also need freedom to act.

Developing Inclusion Under Constraint

The development of inclusion within cultures and a society not wholly committed to inclusive values is fraught with difficulty. It is also severely impeded by government policy. Despite the large number of policies related to inclusion and equality issues, they are fragmented and contradictory. In the words of Tony Blair's leaked memo of July 2000 [12] these are the 'eye-catching initiatives' that are 'soft', and have to be balanced, or cancelled out by 'hard' initiatives appealing to voters on the right of centre to do with choice, competition and selection. This memo expressed Blair's version of 'triangulation' which he learnt from the Clinton regime; 'identifying the two traditional conflicting views of an argument and placing oneself in the middle of them' [13] or as this has often meant, issuing policies supporting both.

I have outlined three interlinked ways of viewing inclusion, increasing participation and reducing exclusion for all, supporting education for diversity within comprehensive community schools and putting inclusive values into action. Government inclusion policies generally cluster around the first of these, but there is a strand associated with teaching for diversity as exemplified with the statutory 'Inclusion Statement' within the national curriculum.[14] The lack of coherence of government inclusion policies was indicated by the way a deputy head of a large secondary school, which has made great efforts to introduce an inclusive culture, introduced herself and a colleague: 'She's inclusion – special educational needs, and I'm social inclusion – naughty boys'. Another teacher from a nearby primary school recounted an incident at the same school where a teacher asked at the end of the school day: 'Can all the gifted and talented students stay behind after the assembly?'

These incidents occurred during a three year study, conducting with colleagues from Manchester and Newcastle Universities [15] exploring how schools can develop inclusion within a policy environment that is, in many respects, unsympathetic to it. We observed the way that schools, in their attempts to develop inclusive cultures, policies and practices, had to negotiate a series of policy tensions. Figure 1 lists many of them.

Some of the schools in this study, as well as other schools in England and elsewhere, have drawn on the 'Index for Inclusion' to support their work.[16] 'The Index for Inclusion' sets down in considerable detail what it might mean to put inclusive values into action in all aspects of a school. The *Index* is intended to revitalise the planning process and help those in schools to take control, over their own development so that it accords more clearly with their own values and is sustained over time. It encourages the involvement of children and young people, their families, carers and communities in reviewing the school so that the process of using the Index, itself contributes to the development of inclusion. It is about development through, dialogue, collaboration, critical reflection and support rather than inspection and competition. It is not about following a prescription, for it encourages schools to uncover the barriers to, and resources to support, learning and participation within their own circumstances.

As we analysed the material collected from our schools during the project, we found ourselves repeating a common story. Schools are under pressures from 'the standards agenda' and 'accountability culture', the way these are interpreted within their LEAs and from local circumstances. These frame their approach to school development and therefore limit the attention they can give to the development of inclusion and how they formulate it. However, the process of making values explicit, attempting to put them into action and resolving contradictions between them extends this discretion. It helps to clarify the frame within which new initiatives are absorbed and around which day-to-day practice is improvised. While inevitably, development remains partial and piecemeal in the messy reality of schools reacting to swirling pressures, we

found that coherence over values can help to reinstate an emphasis on rational planning and the building of long-term sustainable development.

Integrated *v* separated strands of inclusion
An inclusive *v* 'standards agenda' approach to achievement
Teaching and supporting diversity *v* special needs education
Emphasising reality *v* attention to image
Long-term and sustainable change *v* short-term meeting of targets
Attending to conditions for teaching and learning *v* attending to outcomes
Rational *v* reactive planning
CoCCommCommitment to inclusive values *v* compliance to directives
Shared *v* authoritarian leadership
Collaboration *v* competition with other schools
Coordination of schools *v* LEAs 'pared to the bone'.
A considered framework for educational development *v* responding to initiatives

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Figure 1. Policy tensions in schools and LEAs.

Keeping The Future Alive

The more that powerful ways of thinking about education ignore values, the more important it is to discuss them. At times, hedged in by managerialist approaches to government and institutional life, it can seem that attempts at principled action are of little consequence. Yet even where our efforts to make changes in accordance with our values are thwarted, principled action is its own reward. The painstaking task of linking inclusive values to action, keeps alive a resource for acting otherwise.

In 1967, as a new science teacher in a large London comprehensive school, I was asked to give a school assembly. My tutor group studied and read out the poem 'lies' by Yevgeny Yevtushenko and I reproduce the first half of it here. It is call for integrity in our dialogues with children and therefore, with each other. It is an argument for an education that encourages us to engage with the world that needs to be changed if future generations are to be included within it.

Telling lies to the young is wrong
Proving to them that lies are true is wrong.
Telling them that God's in his heaven
and all's well with the world is wrong.
The young know what you mean. The young are people.
Tell them the difficulties can't be counted,
and let them see not only what will be
but see with clarity these present times…
(Yevgeny Yevtushenko, 1962) [17]

Correspondence

Professor Tony Booth, Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury CT1 1QU, United Kingdom (t.j.booth@cant.ac.uk).

Notes

[1] Silone, S. (1950) in R. Crossman (ed.) *The God that Failed*, London, Hamish Hamilton. Ignazio Silone was a founder of the Italian Communist Party in the 1920s and is most well known for his 'anti-fascist' novel *Fontamara*, written in 1933. He became disillusioned with the party, was ejected from it and later joined with others in explaining what led him towards and away from communism in the book from which the quotation is taken. I have been provided with another sharp lesson about false gods, since considerable evidence has been uncovered to suggest that up until 1930 Silone was a police informer and this has called into question the meaning of the novels he wrote in the 1930s (see D. Biocca & M. Canali [2000] *The Informer: Silone, the communists and the police.* Milan: Luni Editrice)

[2] Lane, H. (1928) *Talks to Parents and Teachers.* London: Allen & Unwin.

[3] McMillan, M. (1917) *The Camp School.* London: Allen & Unwin.

[4] Freire, P (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[5] Fromm E. (1941) *Escape from Freedom.* New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston

[6] See M. Gordon (Ed.)(2001) *Hannah Arendt and Education; renewing our common.* Boulder: Westview Press

[7] Simon, B. (1971) *Intelligence, Psychology and Education.* London: Lawrence & Wishart.

[8] See for example, C. Benn & C. Chitty (1996) *Thirty Years on: is the comprehensive school alive and well or struggling to survive?* London: David Fulton.

[9] See for example, S. Hart, A. Dixon, M.J. Drummond and M. McIntyre (2004) *Learning Without Limits.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

[10] See for example, M. Oswin (1973) The Empty Hours: weekend life of handicapped children in institutions. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

[11] Newell, P. (1987) A Proper Regard for Authority, Regulating Schools by Rights, in T. Booth & D. Coulby (Eds) Producing and Reducing Disaffection. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

[12] The Guardian, 18 July 2000.

[13] J. Kampfner (2004) Blair's Wars, p. 9. London: Free Press.

[14] For example in DfEE/QCA (1999) The National Curriculum: handbook for primary teachers in England. London: DfEE.

[15] This was an ESRC funded project 'Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools'. See M. Ainscow, T. Booth & A. Dyson (2005 in press) Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion? London: Routledge.

[16] T. Booth & M. Ainscow (2002) *The Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools*. Bristol: CSIE.

[17] Y. Yevtushenko (1962) *Selected Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.