Presented at ISEC 2000

Listening to Different Voices

Julianne Moss

Abstract

The paper reports on a larger study carried out in the island state of Tasmania, Australia, between 1996-1998. The research reviewed the impact of the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy (ISDP 1995) within the government school system between 1996-1998.

This Qualitative study interprets and critically analyses the stories of five key informants - a parent, two teachers (a support teacher and a class teacher), a policy maker and a university academic - during the early period of the implementation of the IDSP (1995). The visual and literary 'data stories' produced through the study narrate inclusive schooling in the Tasmanian context as a 'detective story' of the special education knowledge tradition, originating from the policy makers' reality rather than from the transformative experience of developing pedagogical models and processes in classrooms and communities.

The paper presents an argument for a poststructuralist approach to research and policy writing/reading that questions traditionalist theorising in the special education field and populist slogans of 'inclusion'.

Introduction

This paper reports on larger study carried out in the island state of Tasmania, Australia, between 1996 -1998. The research reviewed the impact of the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy (ISDP 1995) within the government school system. The qualitative study describes the interpretations of five key informants: a parent, two teachers - a support teacher and a class teacher, a policy maker and a university academic during the early period of the implementation of the ISDP (1995). The paper, like my study uses the organising frame of narrative to interlace a series of stories about inclusive schooling in Tasmania. The story I tell, a narrative of inclusive schooling suggests that there are many voices to be heard in the 'big story' of inclusive schooling. The conference theme Listening to Different Voices, is explored in this paper through my assertion that inclusive education recognises a broad and plural conception of education and weaves into the cultural fabric of schooling threads of difference, social position and need. I conclude by arguing that postmodernist thinking, which is the basis of my researcher's loom, offers possibilities little explored in the special education field and offers important theoretical openings for educational research and policy development.
The context

The study, told through narrative theory, reflects on what I perceive to be an enduring tension in schooling, 'the never ending struggle for social justice' (Lather and Smithies 1997, p.50). In telling this tale I reflect on how my career has lived out the politics of social justice in the schooling system and now the academy. I began my career as a secondary school art teacher working with aboriginal students in remote central Australia. This period was followed by teaching in remote and urban areas of Tasmania. I became a credentialled special education worker in 1980 and laboured as a teacher and principal within special and ordinary schools. As mother's help in my children's classrooms during parenting leave from my paid work, I found out what it was to be 'parent' rather than 'professional' in a classroom. Now I am a member of the academy attempting to reconstruct teacher education. I want to ensure that our future teachers are able to take critically informed action in teaching and learning, thereby implementing education programs that are inclusive of all learners. I draw on feminist theory and postpositivist thinking in these efforts to understand life as not a neat plot, but rather a narrative that is 'multiple, contradictory, changing and differently available, depending on the social forces that shape our lives' (Lather and Smithies 1997, p.125).

Broadly, my study responds to the question, what has inclusive schooling contributed to school reform? The argument, constructed from the Australian educational context and my understanding of schooling in Tasmania, during the early years of the implementation of the ISDP (1995), highlights that in Australia between 1975 and the mid 1990s, we have witnessed numerous legislative initiatives, international covenants and policies aimed at proclaiming anti-discrimination legislation, but it is injustice that is more prevalent than social justice and [injustice] continues to be mirrored in the organisational cultures of schools.

Inclusion and inclusive schooling in Tasmania

The ISDP (1995) statement reads:

**Policy statement**
Placement of students with disabilities in regular schools is the preferred educational option in Tasmania. To the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities should be educated in the company of their age peers while also being provided with curriculum and support to meet their needs.

**Definitions**
Inclusive schooling is the outcome of attempting to provide for all students, including those with disabilities, in regular schools. Inclusion implies providing for all students within the educational program of the regular school. The emphasis is on how schools can change to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Integration is the process of introducing students with disabilities into regular schools from a setting in which they have previously been excluded. Integration implies that students that have been excluded can be introduced into a regular school. The emphasis is on how the student can fit into the existing school structure. Students with disabilities have a degree of physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological impairment which causes a serious restriction in the way that the student is able to function at school. **Rationale and Background**
The rationale and philosophical basis for the policy is contained in the wider policy document 'Equity in Schooling'.
**Goals**

It is intended that:
1. students with disabilities will attend a school setting which is as close as possible to the norms and patterns of schooling as experienced by other students and one that provides the least possible restriction on their right to lead a normal life, while adequately catering for their special needs;
2. students with a range of abilities will be supported in compulsory as well as pre- and post compulsory education with an effective provision and use of human and material resources;
3. educational services to students with disabilities will reflect the diverse needs and varying preferences of these students and a variety of models and provisions being used; and
4. educational services will be provided in accordance with the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the state Disability Services Act 1992.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category A students are students with identified disabilities recommended through an Ascertainment committee. This committee, moderates the funding allocations of districts through the use of a broad classification model. Students with specialist needs are written as Category A and those of a more generalist nature as Category B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Special Education Services and Resource Model**

Special education services in Tasmania have been divided into those which are 'specialist' (Category A) and those which are more 'generalist' (Category B). This distinction forms the basis for the current services and the funding model, which is described in the Equity in Schooling Policy and the Support Materials for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities.

SPECIALIST SERVICES (Category A) are provided to students with low incidence disabilities (e.g., hearing impairment, visual impairment). Early special education services are also included in this category as the number of students is small and the type of service provision is significantly different from other areas.

Students requiring specialist services:

- are relatively easy to identify, i.e. there is usually no argument about their disability;
- are usually known to have needs at an early age, i.e. prior to school occur in numbers that can statistically be predicted on a State-wide basis, according to prevalence rates;
- occur in small numbers, i.e. the numbers are too small to accurately predict numbers in each district;
- are randomly distributed throughout the state;
- often have specialised teaching needs, such as interpreters, braille, therapy input, specialised seating and equipment, building modifications and so on;
- will often require on-going intensive support throughout their school career; and
- should have first priority for special education funding.
The 'detective' story of inclusion

As an Australian and as a Tasmanian, I am part of a history that (re)tells stories of exclusions. My family tree has roots in forebears who were transported to Van Dieman's Land, as Tasmania was first named, for stealing a carpenter's rule. When we examine the two hundred-year history of Tasmanian education our account tells how exclusions of students are a deep and longstanding practice of education. In this paper, I suggest that the ISDP (1995) and by implication inclusion is an example of the staying power of the special education knowledge tradition. Noel Gough, Director of the Deakin Centre for Education and Change at Deakin University through his account of 'fiction' in curriculum inquiry has lead me to interpret the practice of inclusion as an example of an educational 'detective' story, 'a quest for the truth about some aspect of Curriculum, teaching and/or learning' (1998, p.112).

In this study and continuing work that I am doing, I am interested in weaving together, what may appear to be disparate methodological orientations as a means of 'posing options and alternatives and for connecting the "present reality" with past and/or future possibilities' (Gough, 1998 p.93). My belief is that we need to pay close attention to the constructions of the texts of 'inclusion' we produce - in our everyday interactions in schools and classrooms, our talk, the policies we produce, the text books we prescribe for the next generation of teachers, and the meanings of research that we exchange in the academy. I believe we need to work more like archaeologists excavating the layers of thinking from which we are constructed, rather than prescribers of programs and techniques, the traditions of the special education field. On the educational dig, we ought to ask ourselves are our efforts to liberate or are we perpetuating the relations of dominance inherent in the past histories of the special education knowledge tradition? Some recent literature of the special education field theorised from positions other than the medical, psychological or charity based discourses, such as poststrucuturalist thinking, narrative theory and critical discourse analysis, open out important epistemological and methodological questions for the field (Booth and Ainscow 1998, Brantlinger 1997, Corbett 1996, Allan 1999, Slee 1997, Slee & Corbett 2000). In my reading of the literature of the field of 'inclusion', these voices are relatively recent and few in number.

Stories from everyday texts

GENERALIST SERVICES (Category B) are required for students who have 'problems with schooling' in a more general sense. These are the students with 'mild' and 'borderline' intellectual disability, learning difficulties, social and emotional difficulties, and behavioural difficulties. Students requiring generalist services:

- have needs which are not very different in kind from those of other children;
- are usually not defined until they begin school, and experience problems with schooling;
- are difficult to identify, in that they do not have obvious disabilities and are the subject of assessment debates;
- occur in numbers which expand to fit the funding available and the vacancies in special schools;
- occur in large numbers across the state - too many for them to attract special education funding; and
- occur in all schools, and which can be predicted from indices of socio-economic disadvantage.
I aim to understand research practices as part of a critical and liberatory pedagogy, attempting to fray the conditions of certainty of the medical and psychological traditions of research that dominate special education thinking. I am not seeking to find the truth of inclusive schooling, rather an understanding of how the historical and truth effects are being produced (Lather 1991a, p.31). Following postmodernist thinking I use a loomed research method which weaves together the voices of key informants and image-based texts/visual narrative. I use everyday texts to question dominant narratives. I read inclusive schooling as a 'cultural story' with a history, an archaeology, there are disparate voices, many layers, multiple meanings and subjectivities. I work as a weaver of texts, a 'text' worker to generate ideas, to understand how inclusive schooling works not what it is. Images and literary forms told through narratives are the 'data stories' (Lather & Smithies 1997, p.34) of the research.

I am not intent on using image texts as 'a new set of methodological tricks', rather I want to demonstrate that by adding visual narrative to our existing repertoire of research instruments and 'taking it seriously exposes a current of social change which has implications for the practice (and politics) of social research (Walker and Lewis 1998, p. 162). Threading multiple forms of storying I argue that poststructuralist writing and research practice operates through illustration, juxtaposition, metaphor and subjectivity (Rheding-Jones 1996). The intention of the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy ISDP (1995) was to ensure students with disabilities gain access to education in the same learning environments as their peers. This position reflects educational thinking that has been advanced by the special education knowledge tradition and the disability politics of 'normalisation'. The policy statement also makes reference to curriculum and support needs. But as my own knowledge and experiences about the named process of 'inclusion' increased and deepened I began to become more concerned about what was going on in schools, in universities, in the community.

In the field of educational policy development, there has been a concurrent acknowledgement of the circulation of other voices and interpretations (Ball 1994, Ball 1998, Weiner 1994, Slee & Weiner 1998). Taylor (1997, p.24) referring to the recent literature of policy analysis, highlights the growing awareness and emphasis on issues to do with meanings contained in respective policy documents. She relates how there has been a shift towards exploring the effects of policy rather than on policy intentions. Almost a decade earlier, Fulcher (1989, p.3) in her research on integration policies for students with disabilities in Victoria, highlighted the political struggles involved in developing and implementing 'integration' policy and the silence in the research findings of the politics of these struggles. In my tale I have attempted to entwine the many voices of the cultural story of difference, social position and need, and to respond to the methodological issues of developing dialogical research practice. The context of my work within the Australian higher education sector is a site of knowledge contestation. Dramatic restructuring and rationalisation is a part of everyday reality. Rapid change and the complications embedded in these processes foreground the competing discourses and interests in the lifeworld of education.

What follows is a story made up of pieces that I have woven together in an attempt to understand the circulation of the ISDP (1995) in response to the problem what has inclusive schooling contributed to school reform? Following in the paper you will see, (for those of us who have eyes that can see) pieces and threads. I am working in a textual form which when it ends I hope that I have 'spun a yarn or two' reminding us that 'good stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest...delicate hints about theme and thesis' (Barone 1997, pp. 224).
Methodological (dis)position

In framing the methodological position of the study, I set about constructing method that was inclusive of my own constraints as a full-time worker. I was doing this research and other research whilst carrying out a full teaching load in a Faculty of Education that was living out the experience of downsizing and cross campus restructuring. I understood from the recent literature that I ought to recognize that 'researching inclusion must proceed from comprehensive analyses of exclusion' and research should be 'multidimensional and [to] capture the experiential specificity and the broader social structure' (Slee 1997,) and that researchers ought to recognize the 'complexity and plurality of perspectives, voices and interests and the need for researchers to make them explicit' (Booth & Ainscow 1998). At the commencement of my study in 1996 there were few models or suggestions to shake the 'epistemological tree' (Slee 1997, p. 4) of the special education knowledge tradition.

As I moved further into the reconceptualisation of the research design, where I was to be the single researcher, I recognised I would need to pay close attention to my methodological (dis)position and to issues of representation for both the researcher and the researched. Eventually I came to understand that I was engaged with producing a cultural story of schooling, a story which had a history, many actors, (parents, teachers, students, school principals, bureaucrats, politicians and university academics) and a growing circulation in the popular press of affirmative and negative debates 'Integration has gone too far - teachers' 'Disabled student policy strains schools' (The Mercury, Hobart 26/4/98); Forum urges Parent Cooperation. Call for disabled to be in schools' The Mercury, Hobart 24/8/96).

Once I recognised that I was piecing together a 'big story' of many threads I was able to collect data as part of my everyday work and interactions. I too was embedded in this narrative, as I selected, rejected and finger printed the stories, images and documents both old and new. In recent years the academic community has read multiple meanings into the word of inclusion (see Ainscow 1993, 1994, 1997; Booth 1996; Booth & Ainscow 1998; Brantlinger 1997; Clarke, Dyson, Millward & Skidmore 1997; Heeden, Ayres, Meyer & Waite 1996; Lipsky & Gartner 1996; Sapon-Shevin 1995; Meyen & Skrtic 1995; Meyer 1996; Skidmore 1998; Slee 1996a, 1996b; Stainback & Stainback 1992; Udvari-Solner 1996; Thousand, Villa, Stainback & Stainback 1994; Westby, Watson & Murphy 1994). My story was some fact, some fiction. Foregrounding the multiplicity of the tales from the academy and my stories reminds us that no 'true' story can be woven, and that the inclusion story is 'authored'.

My researcher's sett looms the disparate threads of stories from key informants, interspersed with visual narrative and a variety of textual forms. I evolved what I called 'double method' (Moss 1999, p. 2) to tell the story and to enact the methodological struggle of dialogical research practice. The stories from five key informants (a parent, two teachers, a classroom teacher and a support teacher, and the university academic, me!) were told once, reheard and reread and retold two years on. All together the group of disparate texts I produced became subject to a reading of the discourses of inclusive schooling as a 'distinctive order of social relations' (Smith 1990, p.214) and a system of dependencies (Foucault 1984b, p.118). Critical discourse analysis supported me to theorise inclusive schooling as multiply constructed knowledge, as an 'indication of working theory' (Rhedding-Jones 1996, p.28) and the discursive constructions of power/knowledge.

The art form: weaving together visual narratives and the voices of five key informants
Visual narrative 1967


Image 2: The child who has a mental handicap, Educational facilities in Tasmania for handicapped children, Department of Education 1967.


Parent politics: Dee's voice 1996 -1998

Dee is Sam's mother. Sam was six years old when we began conversing and writing together. Dee's story was produced by drawing from a paper and presentation she gave to an 'inclusion' forum organised by the local department of Education in 1996. Dee has a strong understanding of social justice. Her interpretations of the workings of social justice draw from her many life roles - as a parent, partner, self-employed worker, household manager, local historian and member of the Tasmanian community. Sam is the youngest of her four sons. Dee's story tells and retells the construction of the mother's experience, during the early years of the implementation of the ISDP (1995). The second part of the story was written in 1998, three years after the release of the policy.

Dee like the other characters in the study acts as a key informant. Using informants to produce data is part of an ethnographic technique to learn from someone who is a competent member of a setting (Smith 1999, p. 101). In Dee's tale she retells many threads of the experiences of navigating the inclusion policy. Her story includes the issues involved in becoming an eligible member of the category A register and, the recollection from Sam's first school when the kindergarten tale of 'he [Sam] and does naughty things' heard on approach to the school gate, was matched with the physical movement of shying away from Sam and Dee.

This story is contrasted with the description from Sam's present school, a small rural school of just over 100 students, and the annual Christmas play. Dee tells how Sam's teacher was insistent on him making an active contribution to the end of year celebrations. The annual Christmas concert lived up to the usual acclaim amongst the local community. The following day, the proud father who the night before held his open arms backstage after the two line performance, was greeted by the town GP on the daily stroll in Henry Street. The words that exchanged were 'that is what inclusion is all about'.

Visual narrative 1973-1990
In the 'data story' (Lather & Smithies 1997) Teacher Tales we meet Deb and Jo. Deb and Jo are both teachers in the government school system. Deb and Jo provided for me what I can to understand as 'response data'. Deb and Jo were two teachers who participated in an initiative developed by the local Department of Education in collaboration with the University to provide a professional development opportunity for teachers who were working in the support teacher roles, in the newly created District Support structures. I was the course lecturer.

District support services were developed following the restructuring of special education services in the early 1990s. During this period some special schools were closed and support services such as guidance, speech pathology and allied therapy services were redefined. Support teachers were perceived to be important links in the implementation of the ISDP (1995). Deb and Jo's early story was developed from the assignment they prepared for the award-bearing course, EBA 720.

The course modelled on the work of Ainscow (1993) included the engagement of course participants in understanding and implementing a small action research project. In the course guide I wrote 'You may wish to work as a team across the course and submit a group assignment'. What interested me was, of the 26 course participants Deb and Jo were the only two participants, who responded to my invitation to extend the collaborative understandings evident in the course design to the required assessment task. To develop the teachers' story, I collaborated with Deb and Jo between 1996-1998. Recounting their edited text from 1996 through a semi-structured interview we developed the final part of their story in
the spring of 1998. In all stages of developing their tale, Deb and Jo checked and confirmed the evolving story. The story told the circulating discourses of 'inclusion', the authored story that the ISDP (1995) constructs.

'inclusion kids'
'They agree with inclusion, but not the lack of resources'.
'I agree with inclusion, but I reckon we will see the full circle. I think that in 10 years or so there will be special schools again' (Principal, Bill 1996).
'I imagine it would be another policy that was waved...oh put it on the shelf...it was when teachers knew they were going to have an 'included' student'... (Deb 1998).

Visual narrative 1998

Image 16: Snug school 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 17: Snug school 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 18: Four females and one male 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 19: Class teacher 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 20: Teacher aide and students 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 21: Five in a huddle, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group. Image

22: Teacher aide and student 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Image 23: Advance Australia Fair, Kingston primary school open day, Mercury 25 August 1998, copyright the Mercury unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies brother group.

Policy as Text: Lou and Julianne 1996 -1998

The final story in the text belongs to the policy maker and myself. Together we live out aspects of the professional development initiative, the award bearing course that Deb and Jo participated in. Lou at the time had responsibility for Equity policy and services. The ISDP (1995) was implemented shortly after the release of the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling (NSES 1995). This policy became the umbrella policy to the locally developed Equity in Schooling document. Within both polices students with disabilities appear as one of the respective target groups of the policy. I invited Lou to conduct a session on the first day of the course. Her story is developed from her presentation given to the course that was audiotaped as a course resource. Following the approach used in the development of the parent and teacher tales, Lou's story evolved over a three year period and concluded with a reflection on the early phases of the
Doubling our meanings

My methodological disposition which I have textualised as loomed narrative research and double method, attempts to break apart the normative assumptions of policy and practice that pervade understandings of 'inclusion'. Reading policy as text, I understand 'policy is both text and action, words and deeds it is what is enacted as what is intended...(p)olicy as practice is 'created' in a trialectic of dominace, resistance and chaos/freedom (Ball 1994, pp.10-11). Positioning policy within my feminist poststructuralist frame policy becomes an ongoing textual process bringing into view the social relations in which texts are embedded. Students with disabilities are one of the target groups of the NSES policy. In recent years within some Australian states, inclusion policies have appeared in the edicts of educational authorities. Inclusion policies like the working definitions of inclusive schooling do not follow singular or consistently agreed frameworks. The policies are owned by the bureaucracies and have been developed without wide community consultation (Slee 1996a). Connell (1994) alerts us to the incapacity of western educational systems to redress educational inequities. He notes that despite the large number of reform efforts of the twentieth century that have aimed to confront the inequities of minority groups, these reforms are consistently describes as failures.

In my narrative I have constructed a 'big story' of inclusive schooling that does not promote singular meanings and closure. Postmodernist thinking helps me to understand that meaning is constructed within language and is not guaranteed by what the author intends and that the knowledge that is produced as a truth is the knowledge that is linked to the system of power which produces or sustains it (Weiner 1994 p.66-68). Theorising inclusive schooling as multiply constructed knowledge, we can understand as Foucault has represented for us, 'author function' and the importance of re-examining the history of discourses 'Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformation, but according to their modes of existence...but to grasp the subject's point of insertion, mode of functioning and system of dependencies (1984b, pp.1117-8).

Understanding policy as 'texts' of implementation and circulation, the texts of our world bring into play conflicting histories and discourses and foreground the many possibilities in a narrative because of our particular cultural and discursive positioning.

My reflection on the implementation and circulation of the discourses of the ISDP (1995) reads inclusive schooling as an historical knowledge of superimposed narratives. Rather than reading this as a populist story of 'inclusion' that privileges the policy makers' reality and the detective story that begins and ends with the special education knowledge tradition, I want to be a part of a story that invites dialogical interactions and action within our localities. In exploring possibilities of how we may work, perhaps it may be useful to engage with some off the loom work,
represented by the game of cat's cradle. Cat's cradle is a game that is played all
around the world, across cultures, social positions and need. My story invites us to
be suspicious of tales where the privileging of practice and method and an
unproblematic grouping of people by meritocratic stratification remains dominant.
(re)Constructing our theory of inclusive schooling through cultural narratives of
classrooms, curriculum and community - 'witnessing' multiple roles, the 'big story'
questions the kindergarten tale 'he does naughty things', the domination of female
helpers, the continuing under representation of women in leadership roles within
education, tales of fear about disability, the privileging of policy makers' reality and
the status quo represented by the professional voice.

I have woven my story modeling dialogical practice that draws from postmodernist
thinking. Reading inclusive schooling as contexts, texts and politics I have
complicated the story by introducing the game of cat's cradle. I have endeavored to
understand how inclusive schooling works not what is. The poststructuralist
methodology of the study, questions the normative assumptions of research and
policy development and unsettles the 'inclusion' story, the detective story
popularised by the special education knowledge tradition. Playing the game of cat's
cradle, the epistemological voices criss-cross and reminds me that confronting
different perspectives, interests and cultural meanings, teaches me the partiality of
my own position. That's my story... now tell me - what's your story?

References

Ainscow, M. (1993) Teacher education as a strategy for developing inclusive schools,
in Slee, R (ed), Is there a desk with my name on it? The politics of integration,
London, Falmer Press.

Ainscow, M. (1994) Special needs in the classroom: A teacher education guide,

school: constraints and influences', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the


Allan, J. (1995) Foucault and special educational needs: an analysis of discourses,

Allan, J. (1999) Actively seeking inclusion: pupils with special needs in mainstream
schools, Falmer Press, London.


University press, Buckingham.

Ball, S. (1998) Educational studies, policy entrepreneurship and social theory,
whom, Falmer Press, London pp.70-83.

Australian case study of a whole-school policy approach to gender reform', Journal of
Curriculum Studies, vol. 28 no. 3 pp. 253-279.


Education Department of Tasmania (1967) Educational facilities in Tasmania for handicapped children, Education Department Hobart.

Education Department of Tasmania (1973) Educational facilities in Tasmania for handicapped children, Education Department Hobart.


Index

This site is sponsored by Inclusive Technology Ltd.

http://www.isec2000.org.uk/abstracts/papers_m/moss_1.htm 12/07/2011