

# **Theorising practices of inclusive pedagogy: a challenge for initial teacher education**

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## **Introduction**

The concept of inclusion, and the associated pedagogies of inclusion relating to working with children and young people with special needs and disabilities (SEND) within classrooms, have long been central to social justice concerns within initial teacher education (ITE). Yet despite widespread recognition of the importance for preservice teachers to learn about effective pedagogies for all students, including those with SEND, it remains challenging for them to do so. Concepts such as ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive pedagogy’ are associated with a range of diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations and practices that are difficult to cover within the curriculum time-constraints of one-year secondary ITE courses with school placements in mainstream schools.

Preservice and early career teachers are confronted with an evolving picture of the ways such needs are characterised, ranging from specific diagnosis, such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to broader consideration related to issues such as working memory. Labels offer a shorthand to conditions but the headlines can obscure ways in which co-occurring conditions, including social factors, work in concert or generate false associations, such as ASD being associated with intellectual disability. From the perspective of the preservice teacher, the range of labels present a daunting array of issues. What is clear is that the classrooms that teachers are entering are increasingly complex, with many individual needs lacking clear diagnosis.

Moreover, limiting any preparation to teach SEND students in mainstream classrooms to instrumental or technical solutions prevents the possibility of understanding the broader context in which the needs of different groups and individuals are met. ITE programmes have been criticised for providing insufficient opportunities for preservice teachers to learn from the specialist craft knowledge of teachers who work with SEND students outside mainstream education (Ofsted, 2008). For example, national surveys of primary and secondary PGCE

courses by Ofsted (2008) and Nash and Norwich (2010) identified issues of varied practices across school placements and coordinating problems in organising SEND experiences. More recently, the 2015 Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) acknowledged the challenges of addressing SEND effectively, especially within short ITE programmes. Carter (2015) concluded that this involved SEND experience in both mainstream and special school settings.

However, experience of a special school environment does not in itself guarantee an understanding of what inclusive education means or even the roles played by these schools or other forms of alternative within the educational system as a whole. Research has revealed, for example, how difficult it is to challenge the pre-conceived views of some preservice teachers in relation to issues of social justice in education (Thompson et al., 2016). Simply providing particular opportunities will not, therefore necessarily develop an understanding of inclusive pedagogy.

The dialectical concept of practical theorising (McIntyre, 1995) was designed to challenge preservice teachers' preconceptions, develop their pedagogical thinking, and enable them to navigate complex classroom contexts. The aim of practical theorising within the Oxford Internship Scheme in challenging preconceptions includes the intention that opening up both theoretical and practical sources of knowledge to explicit scrutiny will also encourage preservice teachers to subject their own prior beliefs to the same vigorous examination. This process involves McIntyre's (1995) three levels of theorising; technical, practical and emancipatory. For McIntyre (2009), engaging in practical theorising involves preservice teachers learning to understand and respect the professional craft knowledge of experienced and successful school teachers as well as valuing theoretical and research-based forms of professional knowledge and teaching and learning. These two forms of knowledge, experience-based and academic, impinge on the perspectives and practices of the preservice teachers in emancipatory ways that are intended to prepare them for continued learning as teachers.

Within the context of initial teacher education McIntyre (2009) wrote of the particular difficulties of addressing inclusive pedagogy through practical theorising given the contested nature of the concept of inclusion, the variety of different types of SEND and the varied contexts experienced by preservice teachers. Equally, preservice teachers' classroom

experience of attempts at inclusion often focus on difficulties that they face due to perceptions of challenging student behaviour or a lack of training and resources (Ellis et al., 2008; Saloviita, 2020). This poses a challenge to the ideal of learning about inclusive pedagogy from teacher expertise or craft knowledge. If the ‘knowledge’ of inclusion in mainstream schools is based on contested deficit ideologies that persist in some mainstream schools, then opportunities for practical theorising may be limited. Similarly, if the persistence of the idea that teaching students with SEND is someone else’s speciality or that inclusion is impossible without better resources then the various theoretical constructions around inclusion may not be brought into particular focus in mainstream school placements. There is also an inherent danger in sending preservice teachers to outstanding special schools where they may be simultaneously impressed and over-awed by the skill and knowledge of specialist SEND teachers.

This chapter addresses some of the tensions and challenges involved in practical theorising on inclusive pedagogy within the contexts of the contradictions found around issues of inclusion and SEND policy and practice. These contradictions will be further explored in the next section in order to illustrate this particular problem. The chapter will then go on to explore a specific example from the Internship Scheme in which student-teachers are placed in a special needs provision as a way of exploring practices within SEND schools and the types of practical theorising these practices are subjected to.

### **SEND and inclusion: policy and practice**

Historically, policies and practices in the field of SEND have been complex and contested. Throughout this history there has been a vigorous debate around the issue of how far SEND students need a distinct pedagogy, whether SEND pedagogy needs additional preparation, and indeed whether or not there is such a thing as inclusive pedagogy (Lewis & Norwich, 2004; Slee, 2018). Both the conception and practices of inclusive education in the United Kingdom have been marked by tensions and dilemmas between policy pressures on schools to perform well academically and policies designed to be genuinely inclusive of all learners. The 1978 Warnock Report made the case for integration and support for students with special educational needs (SEN) and the 1981 Education Act regulated important practices such as the establishment of SEN co-coordinators in schools. However, a discourse change towards inclusion rather than integration coincided with the 1988 Education Act that introduced a

system of league table competition between schools driven by indices of attainment (Norwich, 2013). This increased competition has led to perverse incentives for schools to follow exclusionary practices particularly in England. Students with (Daniels et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021). This creates particular difficulties for a practical theorising approach to learning about inclusive pedagogies as if schools feel pushed into adopting an exclusionary approach then preservice teachers will not have a practice-based context in which to explore the idea at all.

Inclusion, rather than integration or the fitting in of young people with special educational needs into an existing system, suggests the need to both design and develop new inclusive systems. In this vein, Booth and Ainscow (2003) have argued for broad definitions of inclusion that cover all young people in school. Nevertheless, the discourse around inclusion, and increasingly educational legislation in England, tends to refer to students with SEND. Despite stated commitments to both accountability and inclusion over the past 20 years the commitment to accountability in England appears to have overridden practices of inclusion (Daniels et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021). A notable exemplification of this relates to the tiering of learning objectives in lessons where a desire to be seen to differentiate transcends consideration of the impact. In the context of ITE, awareness is needed in relation to the idea of the teacher standards and how they are operationalised. As Lewis and Norwich (2004) argue ‘a key aspect of professional education and training will include, but also go beyond, a competency model based on practical knowledge and skill’ (p. 218).

Lloyd (2008) argues that: ‘the quest for inclusion through removing barriers to learning perpetuates deficit models of the child within an exclusive curriculum in which success is equated with achieving norm-related standards’ (p. 234). The introduction of Progress 8 as a measure of school accountability exemplifies this trend. Inclusion has been focused on integration and acceptance rather than access to equitable learning opportunities. Tomlinson (2014) has described the ‘SEN industry’ of expanded alternative provision designed to provide provision for those who fall outside the standards agenda. The expansion of academies and free schools in England has increased this industry and also put pressure on individual school finances as they are now directly responsible for buying in a proportion of SEN support.

Inclusion is open to a wide degree of interpretation by a range of stakeholders involved in education. For example, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) identified different interpretations of the idea of inclusive education on the part of parents, children, practitioners, teachers and leaders. Ellis et al. (2008), in a review of the literature, point out that inclusion has been linked to: an ideology or aspiration; a place in either special or mainstream school; government policy; personal experience of inclusion; and, professional practices associated with inclusion (p.9).

Problems persist around uneven and discriminatory practices involved in both the characterisation and diagnosis of particular types of SEN. Tomlinson (2014) has long argued that some discriminatory practices of special education have avoided critique under a veneer of 'benevolent humanitarianism' (p.16). Opening up critical discussion with student-teachers about the process of labelling is an important first step to a fuller consideration of the role of an inclusive pedagogy in supporting all vulnerable learners.

The educational culture of testing and league tables which followed the introduction of a national curriculum had little focus on the teaching and learning provision of special education for students with severe and profound learning difficulties. Even today, when successive governments issue very clear guidelines regarding expectations of attainment for typically developing children, there are rather less clear expectations for all students with SEND who are working significantly below levels expected for their age. In the absence of such national expectations many special schools have developed their own child-centered or focused expectations. Special schools share a willingness and obligation to strive for genuine inclusion which can involve being creative in developing the curriculum and embracing inclusive initiatives that work in their particular contexts. In the context of special school placements this suggests that there is a risk that student-teachers might dismiss what they observed within them as irrelevant to a mainstream school setting.

One of the problems of focusing on inclusive pedagogy within ITE is that has been hard to specify what inclusive practices in the classroom actually look like (Mintz & Wyse, 2015; Norwich, 2014) and how they might differ from pedagogical practice or reflective practice in general. Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) focussed on craft knowledge as a suggested way of bridging literature and practice whilst, more recently, Mintz (2019) has addressed the issue through a focus on the perceived self-efficacy of preservice and early career teachers to work

effectively with SEND students. The work of Florian and colleagues encapsulate the strong social justice impetus behind theories of inclusive pedagogy. For example, Pantić and Florian (2015) argue for a need to combine theories of inclusive pedagogy and teacher agency in teacher education as a way of producing agents of inclusion and social justice.

Challenging negative preconceptions of SEND is particularly difficult in one-year courses. In contrast, in a Scottish study involving a four-year Bachelor of Education programme in Scotland, Sosu et al. (2010) report significant changes in preservice teachers' attitudes to and understaffing of inclusion. Nevertheless, they also concluded that there was a need for further practical experience. In other Scottish studies, Florian and Linklater (2010) and Florian and Rouse (2009) reported that explicitly introducing inclusive pedagogy in ITE programmes can help preservice teachers to focus on their developing pedagogic skills to help learners when they experience difficulty. These results are encouraging yet, as McCluskey et al. (2019) point out, Scotland has in general a more inclusive educational culture than England. The challenge is to find ways of challenging misconceptions within the complex and changing landscapes of the English educational system. Recognition must be given that these misconceptions may be held across initial teacher education partnership schools and that inclusive pedagogy presents huge challenges to schools and consequently to the preservice teachers in these schools.

Learning to respond to student needs can be viewed as the preserve of the expert, particularly when a student's behaviours are viewed as unusual, difficult or exceptional. The notion of an expert teacher suggests that developing capacity to respond and adapt to the needs of the individual is something that develops only with experience and, by implication, time. The challenge therefore is how to learn from the distributed expertise available in school settings in order to avoid the social exclusion of young people with different needs (Edwards, 2004). The nature of collaboration and team work in special school classrooms supports the sharing of expertise. Teams work generates creativity and innovation as staff develop new ways of working. The experience of co-teaching encourages in the moment reflection and responsive teaching. In these ways, the special school placement encourages practical theorising within a complex but supportive school environment.

The explicit development of adaptive skills is part of the meta dialogue discussed with preservice teachers during their school placements. An important distinction between

procedural and adaptive skills (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986) highlights that where teachers had developed routine expertise they were outstanding in terms of speed and accuracy but lacked the flexibility to adjust their knowledge to situations beyond the familiar. The danger here for a preservice teacher is that training does not prefix routine and procedure before developing the capacity to respond to the novel or the individual. Berliner (2001) suggests expertise develops in stages. The notion of expertise as linear and time bound risks lowering the expectation of teachers, especially preservice and early career teachers, to teach students with non-typical learning profiles. In effect this process de-skills them from responding effectively in non-typical learning environments. Practical theorising challenges the notion of teaching to the typical.

Evidence suggests that more students with complex learning profiles are being encountered in mainstream classrooms more frequently. This is not simply a reflection of post Warnock SEND policies for greater inclusivity but reflects the rise in the number of young people with complex learning profiles. There is a case, beyond the moral imperative of inclusivity, for expedience to meet the changing profile of needs in mainstream classrooms. To thrive in a mainstream classroom, preservice and early career teachers must be adaptive. This means that they are enabled to recognise and respond to the challenge that one teaching strategy will not suit all children. To be able to adapt in response to the individual needs of young people is vital to quality teaching in the dynamic and unpredictable context of the classroom. Developing adaptive skill, and the recognition that this develops with increased knowledge of the learner, can build the confidence of the preservice teacher.

Practical theorising as clinical reasoning directly supports the development of adaptive skills that supports teachers to problematise as they encounter new learning experiences with the support of an experienced teacher. A literature review for the UK Ministry of Defence by Ward et al. (2018) describes learning adaptive skill as the *condition sine qua non* of expertise. Ward et al. were exploring adaptive skill in relation to new soldiers going into a war zone. Here, traditional notions of developing routine and procedural expertise before being trained to develop adaptive skills simply wouldn't make sense. You cannot go into a warzone and predict accurately every time where an attack will come from. You have to learn quickly and from the very beginning of training how to apply knowledge to a range of situations. In complex operational environments that are ever changing and unpredictable, Ward et al. (2018) argue that practitioners need to be both skillful in carrying out routine aspects of their

work and adaptive in unexpected or novel situations. The soldier going into a warzone is perhaps an uncomfortable analogy for a preservice teacher going into the classroom but frankly, for both, accelerating proficiency is highly desirable. The special school offers preservice teachers a learning environment where complexity is an intrinsic part of the experience and allows them the opportunity to encounter and teach children with atypical profiles. Teacher training through complexity preservation must be central if preservice and early career teachers are to develop the confidence and capacity to expect learner diversity. Practical theorising as part of their long-term toolkit for responding to the diversity of learner profiles in special and mainstream schools requires recognition.

### **The Special School placement**

Inclusive pedagogy, as outlined by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), shifts the emphasis from some students with needs to thinking about everybody in the classroom. This focus on the craft knowledge of teachers' inclusive pedagogy offered a way of framing the Oxford Internship Scheme's extended learning opportunities (ELO), which involves the placement of student-teachers in a range of alternative provision settings for a week before they transition to their second mainstream placement. The ELO week is intended to provide an opportunity for them to safely explore complexity; working with unusual and challenging situations, from complex learning difficulties to manifestations of extreme behaviour. The placement is constructed to support student-teachers' practical theorising in a context in which they might very easily feel overwhelmed and to promote transfer into other contexts. The aim is to move away from a focus on a perceived 'war zone' through observation and discussion with colleagues about craft knowledge; the principles of inclusive pedagogy, along with possible strategies; and curriculum issues.

The ELO week is designed as a means of questioning student-teachers' understandings of inclusive pedagogy within mainstream schools. It is an intensive opportunity for reflection on theory and newly established mainstream practices. It is not an experience premised on learning about special education or to understand more about complex learners through a 'different' experience; quite the opposite. There is a clear ambition to use the ELO experience in a special school to strengthen teaching within mainstream classrooms. The placement is tailored to make links between the ELO/SEND placement experience and student-teachers' mainstream experience, looking at what makes effective teaching in the

special school and what/how this learning can usefully transfer to the mainstream classroom. The experience is framed as learning from complexity rather than as an experience of a special school and special children.

The focus is therefore placed on the student-teachers' learning, prompting consideration of issues beyond the curriculum and inclusion, to a point of reconceptualising the teacher as learner. Practical theorising combined with insights from inclusive pedagogy offers an approach that focuses on the student-teachers' acquisition of adaptive skills, developed and underpinned by careful scrutiny of the ideas offered to them. The cultivation of a disposition to ask questions enables student-teachers to interrogate the labels used about SEND and inclusion and can be a catalyst for the emancipatory thinking for which McIntyre argued.

The ELO placement week then is designed to provide a new practicum for student-teachers in which to review their own principles and emergent practice and to understand to what extent this has been influenced by their own life experiences as well as the values and expectations of the school where they have had their substantive school placement. The value of the ELO for strengthening teaching is dependent upon the efficacy of the bridging experience and in understanding how transferable the principles established as part of the core curriculum programme connect with the placement experience. For maximum impact on each teacher's development the placement has to be established as an integral part of learning to teach, rather than as a 'bolt on', an experience afforded to student-teachers for the sole purpose of learning about students with SEND. The 'bolt-on' view risks the danger of student-teachers seeing SEND as something teachers learn about after they have developed the fundamentals of good teaching. This establishes another dangerous set of beliefs in motion for preservice teachers who might feel better equipped to teach their notion of a 'typical' child but see a non-typical child as the responsibility of the SENCO or the Teaching Assistant assigned to their support. In effect, the notion of needing an 'additional body of knowledge' (e.g. what is autism and how to identify it) alongside expertise to support a diagnosis effectively de-skills student teachers. The ELO is designed to challenge this mindset and reestablish their confidence to feel they don't need to bring solutions or prior knowledge but that their expertise for teaching all students is dependent upon a methodology of inquiry, problem solving and the incremental process of getting to know the individual. The aim then is to move away from thinking how ITE prepares student-teachers to teach students with SEND to how ITE can equip student-teachers to teach students who learn

differently. Student-teachers working in special school settings can develop the flexibility, creativity and resilience to extend their knowledge and understanding of pedagogy, to sharpen their forensic teaching skills and to participate in inquiry-based practice to find the best way forward for the individual children and young people whom they teach. This expertise or craft knowledge of inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), prevalent in special schools, is potentially very applicable for students with SEND in mainstream schools and settings.

Alongside the classroom enactment is the framing of this experience by the school leaders (hosts) encouraging the student-teachers to frame this classroom experience not as different but as core experience that will be of real relevance to teaching and learning in mainstream settings. The priority for the ELO week is to identify the similarities rather than the differences to their mainstream classroom.

To give a specific example, at one inner city special school (ages 2-19) the pivotal view of special education is that it is about the “individual”; when thinking about special educational needs and disability there is a limited place for terms such as typical, usual, average or regular. Classes at this school are not organised by grouping of students with similar diagnostic labels. Learner profiles are very varied and therefore lesson planning is tailored to individuals. In fact, in one classroom there may be several different curricula in action. Progress is reflective of personal progress and not comparable performance. This challenges the student-teachers’ views of planning for a child who is stuck and can’t move forward. Student-teachers describe how they usually plan with the majority of their students in mind and then simplify for those who have learning difficulties and consider extension activities for higher attainers. Here, the student-teachers experience a challenge to this approach in recognising that having a cognitive difficulty doesn't mean everything needs simplifying. At the end of each day student-teachers discuss together how the teachers in the school attempt to remove barriers or break down a task into chunks making manageable for a learner who has memory difficulties, but without reducing expectations. These reflections are linked to their reading around bell curve thinking. For example, student-teachers might say “I am starting to see how I have lower expectations of my SEN students and sometimes prevent them from engaging in tasks they may well be capable of mastering with the right support.” These insights are linked back to their reading of research on inclusive pedagogy as part of their initial consideration of inclusivity and diversity through the Professional Development

Programme.

On the first day of their placement week student-teachers are told that this is not an experience to know and understand what happens in a particular special school. This is an opportunity to look at the process of how children learn through a magnifying glass. For example, student-teachers may encounter students with extremely complex and multiple learning difficulties. The preservice teachers observe the skills of experienced practitioners as they work through the acute challenges involved in teaching these young people. In these lessons the teaching teams articulate the dilemmas and share these with the students. For example, “we are really struggling to tie those laces today, perhaps we’ll try a different approach, what do you think? Let’s have a go at using one hand at a time first”. The students are viewed by the school as partners in the learning process and the meta dialogue is intended to help them recognise how they are learning. It emphasises the ‘doing with’ not ‘doing to’, but for a preservice teacher this exposure to the methodology is incredibly powerful. The tacit knowledge of the teachers is being shared, reflected upon constantly and the problem-solving process modeled in real time.

Where a special need arises from a learning difficulty, the path to successful learning is far less clear; working effectively with children with special educational needs in a special school setting requires a great deal of creativity from practitioners; the intellectual demands of supporting learning in a child and young person for whom there is no readily prescribed curriculum or pedagogy are key element of teaching students with SEND, both in terms of meeting individual need and meeting the needs of a changing and evolving demographic. The student-teachers’ brief for the final afternoon is to present to their peers what they have learnt from their time at the specialist setting, and how they plan to apply this in their future teaching.

### *Learning from Special Education*

The ELO week is an intensive learning experience within the context of practical theorising in terms of challenging any preconceptions about SEND, developing inclusive pedagogy and tackling complexity through adaptive teaching. Learning from a special educational setting provides a unique opportunity to explore complexity in the classroom involving learners with special educational needs and disabilities. However, the placement is also designed to help student-teachers reflect on ways that all children might learn in inclusive settings. This

involves attending to both the technical and the practical considerations of inclusive pedagogy with a view to the emancipatory position that no longer sees the teaching of SEND students as the preserve of the expert.

Observation on the special school setting allows student-teachers to witness how SEND teachers engage in a process of inquiry about the learner. Teachers who work autonomously with students who face severe challenges to learning can recognise how to navigate and overcome these barriers by adapting their planning to support the learners in taking each cognitive step to further their understanding. During the placement, student-teachers focus on how effective classrooms create effective learning opportunities for students of all shapes, sizes and abilities. This experience is intended to disrupt and challenge the student-teachers' trajectory as teachers in order to refocus on: their own learning rather than their teaching; observation and noticing; hypothesising and problem solving; and, learning through collaboration and reflection.

#### *Learning to observe/to notice*

A special school experience has the potential to liberate student-teachers, allowing them to focus their full attention on the students, and exposes these preservice teachers to abstraction and innovation. The ELO placement experience is designed to be both a challenge and a liberation for student-teachers; a week when they can 'flip' their focus from 'what am I teaching' to 'who am I teaching'. They learn skills to better understand the individual through explicit observation, co-teaching, ongoing reflective dialogue with a team of practitioners and, most importantly, the idea of the teacher as a problem solver. These experiences support the preservice teachers toward considering new and innovative approaches to their teaching.

One of the skills that is particularly encouraged as part of the placement experience is 'noticing'. Observation as part of a PGCE experience is always encouraged in new contexts but the special school experience goes further. Student-teachers are asked to conduct a 'close child observation'. The task is explained as part of the process of 'getting to know and understand your learners'. They are asked to identify a child who puzzles them or makes them feel particularly uncomfortable. Having identified this child, they are asked to observe the child beyond the usual classroom interactions; perhaps outside at playtime, or eating at lunch or when their parent/carer comes to collect them. The student-teacher is then asked to

reflect on their observation not in relation to the behaviour of the child but their own reaction to that behaviour. What makes them feel worried about this learner, what do they feel when they see him/her interact with others, how does this compare with their own interactions, what do they find difficult or challenging about their own feelings? For some student-teachers this is the first time they have been encouraged to consider their own discomfort about forming relationships with students. To explore this is difficult and the process of reflection is carefully navigated part way through the week using circle time principles. By this time, it is hoped the student-teachers feel safe to share their reflections with their peers and with the host who facilitates this sharing of observation and emotions they evoke.

Experienced teachers' ability to notice individual characteristics becomes part of their tacit knowledge. With experience and reflection good teachers build noticing skills which allow them make relationships, to pre-empt behaviour problems, maximize motivation and cater to each child. The opportunity for student-teachers to observe learners in the special school is almost an incubator experience. The intensity of the special classrooms with its small number of students and their acute needs accelerates the learning trajectory.

### *Learning to hypothesise and problem solve*

As the student-teachers become comfortable with understanding more about 'who' they are teaching there is an important role for the school hosts to support reflections on 'how' this growing knowledge of the individual learners is developed. In the particular special school placement of our example, the student-teacher is introduced at the start of the week to the graduated cycle of formative assessment. This meta learning is given import from the outset. A Code of Practice is introduced at the start of the placement week where the cycle of assess, plan, do, review is explained as a process of learning that is used to "get to know and understand your students". The school liken this process of inquiry to "being a detective in the classroom". Through the week, the student-teachers collect examples of small steps formative assessment through: watching, asking, testing and observing. For example, with a child who is still learning to explore new foods, the student-teacher may sit with them at snack time and try a range of strategies to encourage curiosity about new textures. They might start by simply presenting the food and if this doesn't promote interest, try hiding the food under a bowl or allowing the child to play with the food first to build confidence with the texture. Smearing yogurt across the table at an initial stage is trialed and the value of

curiosity is celebrated. Through processes such as this the student-teachers learn through the complexity of teaching children with acute needs rather than teaching to their previous conceptions of the 'typical'.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of practical theorising within a special school SEND context may help student-teachers to significantly challenge and sometimes modify their thinking about both inclusion and their practice as teachers in mainstream schools. In particular, the student-teachers are asked to reconceptualise what is meant by inclusion in pedagogic terms in thinking about the ways in which potential is assessed and developed. The experience of the ELO week suggests the importance of disrupting the practicum experience of teaching in mainstream schools. This also raises challenges for further research to consider to what extent do teachers' attitudes towards difference and institutional ethos help shape inclusive pedagogy.

There is a useful distinction to be made between what preservice teachers can learn from questioning systems of schooling (understanding how the tensions between accountability and inclusion create pressures for schools) and what they learn at the level of classroom-based decision making. There is also an inherent tension for preservice teachers who question systems and yet have to work in schools that are more concerned with accountability than inclusion. Whilst the ELO is intended to offer an incubator experience through complex case studies of children with learning difficulties, it is important to recognise that development of flexible decision making in the classroom cannot develop in isolation during the ELO week. The ELO must build on the experiences of their first school placement and be further developed through their final placement. Key questions this raises is whether and to what extent is the student teachers' learning transformational and how is this learning reflected in the way they approach their second placement? Further research is needed in this area.

Integrating inclusive pedagogy and practical theorising offers scope to enable a student teacher in a changing policy environment to cultivate the adaptive skills needed. The approach preserves the complexity needed to meet acute SEND needs but more broadly facilitates student teachers to commit to an inquiry-based approach that supports their learning and ask bigger questions about context. In this sense the ELO week is a potential

catalyst of more emancipatory practical theorising.

However, important questions remain for ITE and inclusive pedagogy. The structure and nature of PGCE programmes are still linear and not conducive to cultivation of a more graduated/circular approach. Even within the context of practical theorising it is also important to consider just how context dependent the 'craft knowledge' student teachers may be. The danger is that these encounters in special schools is a consideration that might be inhibiting as well as useful. It may be that the practical theorising actually happens elsewhere such that the key is how the discussion is facilitated across sites, the ELO placement, the university sessions and the mainstream placement. McIntyre (2009) argued that the English system of ITE was primarily a 'preparation for the status quo' (603) limiting scope for the adoption of inclusive pedagogies approaches that offer a critique. He suggested practical theorising in the context of the Oxford Internship offered an alternative way forward based on informed partnership where ideas such as inclusive pedagogy were embraced by both university and schools. Any such ideas needed to be 'clearly conceptualised and rigorously justified' so that student teachers would have the 'opportunity in school to explore their feasibility and to debate its merits and their practicability' (McIntyre, 2009: 605). Unless this agreement is sought the benefits of the ELO week may be limited. As Hagger and McIntyre (2006) argued putting professional craft knowledge into practice is a complex business not least because it needs to engage with the preconceptions and prior experience of both preservice and experienced teachers.

Preservice teachers need to be supported to look both inwards and outwards. Looking inwards involves a consideration of their own practice in light of what they have seen both in the alternative setting and their mainstream setting which is why the positioning of the ELO is key. McIntyre (1993) notes that 'reflecting on one's own practice, and especially engaging in action research, leads one to emphasise one's own agency' (p.46). But if we are to enable preservice teachers to move beyond practical and technical we need to allow them to consider how their own attitudes are shaped by their experiences and their institutions. This turn outwards forces a consideration of the institutional and societal contexts that have shaped practice. However, caution is needed in characterising preservice teachers as the sole agents of inclusion and thought also needs to be given to how this is interpreted across university and school ITE partnerships.

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