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Including Psychology in Inclusive Pedagogy: Enriching the Dialogue?

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Including Psychology in Inclusive Pedagogy: Enriching the Dialogue?

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a complex field of study and practice that requires good communication and dialogue between all involved. Psychology has to some extent been marginalised in these educational dialogues. This is, in part, due to psychology's perceived heritage in the standardised testing that has been used to support the educational segregation of certain individuals and groups of students. Some have also expressed fundamental doubts about the prospects of investigating human experience and education through 'scientific' method in psychology. In this paper I discuss the relationship between inclusive education, dialogue and psychology, with a focus on the dialogic aspects of inclusive classroom pedagogy. I analyse how a group of eight early career primary (elementary) school teachers in England talk about inclusive pedagogy at the start their involvement in a one-year research project on this topic. Their conversation suggests the strong presence of psychological thinking, alongside the teachers' other references to classroom practice, children's rights and social identities. Conclusions are drawn about the need to include the heterogeneous field of psychology in the continuing dialogues of inclusive education, while also considering new forms of psychology for inclusive education.

Keywords: Psychology; inclusive education; pedagogy; dialogue; teachers' talk; primary (elementary) education



Incluyendo la Psicología en la Pedagogía Inclusiva: ¿Un Diálogo Enriquecido?

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Resumen

La inclusión educativa es un campo de estudio complejo, que requiere de una buena comunicación y diálogo de todos los implicados. Hasta cierto punto, la psicología ha sido marginalizada de estos diálogos educativos. Esto se debe, en parte, a la percepción de que la tradición de evaluación psicológica estandarizada ha servido a la segregación educacional de ciertos individuos y grupos. Hay quienes dudan de la agenda de investigación que pretende analizar la experiencia y educación humanas mediante el método “científico” en psicología. En este artículo, discuto la relación entre inclusión educativa, diálogo y psicología, poniendo el foco en los aspectos dialógicos de una pedagogía inclusiva. En el estudio participó un grupo de ocho profesores en sus primeros años de ejercicio docente en escuelas primarias de Inglaterra. Específicamente, analizo la forma en que se los docentes se refieren a la pedagogía inclusiva al comienzo de un proyecto de investigación en el área, de un año de duración. Sus conversaciones sugieren una fuerte presencia de pensamiento psicológico, además de referencias a prácticas de aula, derechos del niño e identidades sociales. Las conclusiones apuntan a la necesidad de incluir el heterogéneo campo de la psicología en los diálogos acerca de inclusión educativa. A su vez, aparece la necesidad de considerar nuevas formas de psicología para la inclusión educativa.

Palabras clave: psicología; educación inclusiva; pedagogía; diálogo; habla de los docentes; educación primaria.

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Inclusive education is so diverse and complex that those who are engaged in research, practice and policy development may only glimpse others at a distance, moving in all directions. Some may be trekking purposefully towards the same destination as ourselves, while others appear to be making a totally different journey. In developing inclusive education we need to find a way to communicate with anyone who is concerned with the rights and interests of all students learning in very different social and educational contexts. This can sometimes be difficult when people's aims, values, knowledge and beliefs about inclusion can vary so widely.

The central argument of this paper is that inclusive education is achieved in dialogue with others. This is not just a case of finding ways to communicate effectively, although that is important. It is also a matter of engaging actively in the often challenging process of hearing different voices and seeing different perspectives without necessarily reaching synthesis or agreement (Wegerif, 2008). Inclusive education holds intrinsic tensions and dilemmas that may not reach final resolution, although some sort of coherent view is required for ethical and practical reasons (Norwich, 2014). Compromise may be essential when individual human costs and benefits are weighed up, but active dialogues need to continue in the system itself.

Psychological thinking and practice is commonly marginalised, ignored or rejected in dialogues about educational inclusion. There are reasons for this, not least because psychological research has been negatively implicated in the practices of individual testing that have been used to justify certain students' educational separation and exclusion (Croizet, 2013; Greenstein, 2016; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). Thomas (2014) is concerned that scientific knowledge may be valued over personal knowledge when questions arise about why some children are not succeeding at school. Bridges (2013) argues further that the scientific basis of much psychology can only ever lead to a partial understanding of human experience and education.

Yet it seems odd to squeeze psychology out of research on inclusive education. Inclusive education is inevitably concerned with a whole of range of topics that have been investigated under the umbrella of 'psychology', including:

- the experiences of students and teachers in school
- student identity, motivation and learning
- classroom communication and relationships
- school, home and community links
- approaches to educational assessment
- teachers' pedagogical knowledge, practice and professional learning
- multi-professional communication and teamwork
- the organisational operation of schools
- and so on

In this paper I am concerned with how a psychological perspective, broadly defined, may contribute positively to the dialogic engagements of inclusive education. This includes some implications for valuing new forms of psychological thought and methodology.

Researching Inclusive Education

Recent studies of inclusive education have reiterated the need to take stock of the field and examine what is actually happening in different practice contexts. Smyth et al (2014), for instance, adopt an international comparative perspective. They trace the 'implementation trajectories' of four European countries (Ireland, Austria, Spain and Czech Republic) moving towards more inclusive education systems within a common international UN and European policy environment. They conclude that

...(w)hile there is apparently broad agreement at an international level about what inclusive learning environments should look like, there is considerably less agreement about how this can be achieved at national and local community level. The range of legacy interests, pressures and priorities operational in individual education systems is inevitably shaping the manifestation of enabling legislation as well as of provision within schools. (p.442).

This apparent lack of consistency in developing inclusive learning environments is not entirely surprising, given the competing pressures

applying in local and national educational systems. There is a question of system capacity here. Ainscow et al (2016) analyse how English primary schools and teachers can respond to increasingly diverse populations of learners. They comment on the relevance of three interlinked sets of factors that apply *within* schools, *between* schools and *beyond* schools, bearing in mind local demographics, economics, cultures and histories. This points to the need for those in school to share practices with each other, developing a common language to do so, and for schools to collaborate more widely with each other, with community partners and researchers. Ideally it tips the balance away from generic ‘what works’ approaches towards the knowledge that is grown in local school contexts.

This type of recent work on inclusion not only raises questions about the inherent power relationships and other constraints in complex educational systems, it also highlights the conceptual challenges that can hinder communication and dialogue. Researchers have long acknowledged the conceptual difficulties in defining inclusion. In a recent review, Göransson & Nilholm (2014) identify four different types of definition: the physical placement of children with identified disabilities or in need of special support in general education classrooms; meeting the social/academic needs of these identified pupils; meeting the needs of *all* pupils; and the creation of school and classroom communities which are participatory, equitable and valuing of diversity. In conclusion, Göransson & Nilholm remark from philosophical and political perspectives that: ‘...the definitional problems indicate differences in beliefs about what schools can and should accomplish. This brings the question of power into the analysis. Who should decide what version of inclusion should be the goal of schooling?’ (p.275)

In commenting on this work from his own experience of conducting an earlier systematic review on how schools facilitate all students’ participation, Dyson (2014) turns to the intrinsic difficulties of conducting research using established methodologies when it remains unclear that inclusion can actually be studied in this way. His concern is that: ‘...for many researchers, inclusive education is not a set of practices whose effects can be evaluated, but is a principle (or, more accurately, a set of principles) which is embodied in different ways in different contexts.’ (p.282)

Dyson sees the consequences in research that is ‘descriptive, celebratory and exhortatory’ rather than convincingly evaluative. The associated danger, in his view, is that inclusion research is inevitably limited in scope and potentially stranded on the moral high ground without influence on practitioners and policy-makers. This is where authentic dialogue is required. The creative acknowledgement of a dialogic gap or difference in perspectives is a prime source of meaning and creativity in a complex and often problematic situations. As Wegerif (2007:28) puts it: ‘...(it) indicates a challenging direction of development for individuals and society towards a greater capacity for creative thinking and a greater capacity for learning to learn, intimately linked to an ethics of openness to the other’.

Psychologically this requires the co-ordination of different perspectives, not just between people in conversation but in our own thinking. Fernyhough (2016) remarks on this in his discussion of ‘inner speech’ and dialogic learning from a cognitive perspective: ‘Thinking is a dialogue, and human cognition retains many of the powers of a conversation between different points of view’ (p.98).

Others agree that conversation is important as a basis for creativity and problem-solving:

...when people of any age are working together to create new ideas and understandings, (t)hey use talk and joint activity to create a shared resource of ideas that can be jointly considered, and a framework for collected working that will enable their work to progress. (Littleton & Mercer, 2013, p. 110)

I have deliberately presented this brief section with several quotes from relevant literature, representing a (selective) range of perspectives. These and other written voices influence our own thinking, and we in turn bring new ideas to our conversations and writing about inclusive education. There is an inevitable selection process involved in the attention and value given to different speakers and forms of knowledge - we would otherwise be overwhelmed with a cacophony of voices. We can, however, ask if the selection of different points of view is random or systematic within our own thinking and in the more formal processes of research, policy and practice – i.e. what forms of knowledge are valued and used, where and by whom?

Dialogues in and about Inclusive Education

It is hard to imagine an inclusive educational system without people's willingness to consider other perspectives and engage in productive dialogue, including the political negotiations involved in setting political priorities and education budgets. Inclusion depends on people's capacity and willingness to communicate across boundaries of geography, language, professional priorities and personal concerns.

A wealth of research has turned towards a broadly dialogic perspective on inclusion, with interests ranging from the uses of talk and dialogue as means of involving marginalised communities in education to the means of classroom learning and teaching for all students. This body of work represents rather different perspectives on dialogue, informed by theoretical debates such as those between followers of Vygotsky and Bakhtin (Wegerif, 2008). Some studies focus on the social and educational value of talk and other forms of communication, generally following a social constructivist model of joint activity and learning. Others look to the creation of meaning within the contrasting discourses and alternative perspectives of human relations. To give some examples: Flecha (2011) discusses a 'dialogic sociology of education' that emphasises the role of communities and human agency in challenging unequal structures and practices in society. Everyday processes are discussed and developed jointly between researchers, practitioners, students, parents and other community members to implement 'successful educational actions' that help to overcome social inequalities. One such action is seen in the adoption of heterogeneous classroom groupings designed to promote social interaction, dialogue and learning for all students, including vulnerable minority ethnic populations, with the support of adult community members (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). Classroom conversation has been acknowledged as key to inclusion in settings where some children may be identified with special educational needs and disabilities (Berry & Englert, 2005; Ní Bhroin, 2013), while Rajala, Hilppö & Lipponen (2012) examine whether a form of 'exploratory' talk known to support higher order thinking is itself equitable and inclusive of different students. Studies have also been conducted using interviews and discussions to gain better understanding of students' experiences of inclusion both during and after

their school experience (Adderley *et al*, 2014; Diez, 2010; Tetler & Baltzer, 2011).

Creating space for professional dialogue has been seen as central to the development of inclusive schools (Howes, Grimes & Shohel, 2011) and pedagogical innovation (Moate, 2014). Collaborative and inclusive practices in schools have been promoted through dialogue, including a goal-directed use of Socratic method designed to challenge teachers' thinking and bring in new practices (Tragoulia & Strogilos, 2013). It has been suggested that a shared pedagogical vision is important for students and others to feel that they belong to an inclusive school community (Hazel & Allen, 2013), but one of the features of a (Bakhtinian) dialogic understanding of school development is that it does not pre-suppose consensus in school about provision required for students experiencing difficulty (Skidmore, 1999).

We can see from this brief selection of research that communication may not only be required to argue *for* the development of inclusive education, but communication and different forms of dialogue are ideally embedded *in* the experience of inclusive education. This is particularly evident when describing what inclusive education may look like in classroom practice with reference to student learning. Sheehy (2013) refers to a review of pedagogies and outcomes for the academic and social inclusion of pupils identified with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms (Sheehy & Rix, *et al*. 2009), identifying the pedagogic features of an inclusive classroom as:

1. Social engagement being intrinsic to the pedagogy
2. Flexible modes of representing activities
3. Progressing scaffolding of classroom activities
4. Authenticity of classroom activities
5. Pedagogic community

Sheehy (2013, p. 242) summarises:

...this refers to the teacher facilitating cooperative group work, using a variety of representations of problems to present and discuss issues... (Pupils) engage gradually with concepts and develop the skills they need...(T)he teacher is part of pedagogic community. They are supported by, and contribute to, a group who

have a shared view of what they are teaching and why they are teaching it in a particular way.

This belief in the importance of classroom communication is supported in other discussions of inclusive pedagogy, especially those that adopt a social constructivist perspective on the collective experience of inclusive classroom learning. Situated and distributed understandings of cognition, together with opportunities for multimodal communication, point towards the incorporation of purposeful, real-world classroom activities to engage students and teachers in valuing each other's experience, constructing knowledge together and developing higher level cognitive skills (Kershner, 2009). Reviews of educational programmes designed for cultural and/or linguistic minority students come to similar conclusions, as we see in Tharp & Dalton's (2008) account of the universal features of classrooms that promote educational success for diverse and at-risk student populations. Their standards to meet in classroom teaching include the following, with the prospect of more to come:

1. Teachers and students producing together
2. Developing language and literacy across the curriculum
3. Making meaning – connecting school to students' lives
4. Teaching complex thinking
5. Teaching through instructional conversation

Tharp & Dalton (2008) remark that while the effects of this pedagogy may be directly attributed to the means of assisting students' performance and promoting development, there are different strands of theoretical thinking that offer further support. For instance, they suggest that cultural-historical-activity theory's focus on relating the personal to the cultural with a development orientation can be placed alongside a cognitive science perspective on the efficacy of instructional dialogue and contextualisation for prompting cognitive processing, improving conceptual retention and reducing cognitive load.

In relation to these views of inclusive classroom practice we can further

acknowledge the essential social and emotional conditions of learning (Noddings, 1992) as well as the importance of teachers' beliefs and strategies for teaching all students by responding respectfully to student difference and rejecting deterministic beliefs about ability to learn (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). Thus, the essential notion of 'pedagogy' within inclusive pedagogy extends beyond the overt techniques and knowledge of teaching to encompass the classroom relationships and educational purposes that support all children's learning. A teacher's concern for the well-being and flourishing of individual learners in class is accompanied by similar concern for the whole class group. Inevitably these perspectives do not always align or balance within and beyond each school but, as mentioned above, consensus may not be necessary for a school to move forward.

While the communication between students and teachers in inclusive classrooms and schools is well-established, less attention has been given directly to how people talk about the concept of inclusive education itself. We do not know a great deal about what may support or hinder productive dialogue about inclusion when attitudes and beliefs can vary so widely. This is not due to lack of attention to people's thoughts on the topic, particularly with regard to teachers. There is great research interest in teachers' *attitudes* to inclusion, for instance. A search of the British Education Index combining 'attitude' and 'inclusion' and 'teacher' resulted in 276 recent references at the time of writing this paper, with empirical studies reported from across the world. In comparison there seems to be less work on what happens when teachers and others discuss their various ideas and concerns about inclusion.

In order to explore the ways in which dialogues about inclusion may actually operate between people, I will turn next to an example of how teachers who are interested in inclusion talked about it when focusing on their pedagogical practice. What comes to the minds of teachers in such conversations?

Talking About Inclusive Pedagogy

This discussion below occurred during a recent project that I have been involved in with my Faculty co-investigator Dr. Kristine Black-Hawkins. A group of eight primary (elementary) teachers in early career (within 1-3 years of qualifying) had joined a research project focusing on the

development of inclusive pedagogy. The year-long project included four Faculty-based workshops for the teachers, as well as teachers' classroom-based inquiries and wider school-based discussions with the teachers, senior leaders and pupils (Black-Hawkins and Kershner, in preparation). At the first workshop the following discussion activity, which was devised and led by Kristine Black-Hawkins was set up both as a social ice-breaker and as a means of activating the teachers' thinking and talk about inclusive pedagogy. The teachers were asked to work in pairs to respond to four key words written on large sheets of paper. These words were selected to represent possible aspects or components of inclusive classroom learning that could be meaningful to the teachers: BELONGING, LEARNING, DIVERSITY, PARTICIPATION. (The term 'inclusion' was deliberately avoided at this point, partly in order to prompt and trace alternative ways of thinking from the start of the project.) The tables were set out so that each pair started with one of the words and then moved the next in the same order on the facilitator's signal. This continued until all the groups had made written comments in response to all four key words and then returned to their starting place for a final discussion. Each round of conversation was just 2-3 minutes long and the whole activity was completed within 20 minutes. The conversations were audio recorded and then transcribed using an 'intelligent verbatim' style that omits repetitions and filler words.

There are different ways in which this sort of conversation can be analysed, according to different purposes (Littleton and Mercer, 2013). A *linguistic* analysis may focus on conversational acts such as questioning, while a *psychological* analysis could be concerned with the communicative relationship and thinking (e.g. collective reasoning, response to other speakers, and discussion of particular topics). A *cultural* level could include the conversational 'ground rules' and the communicative principles that are valued in that context (e.g. clarity, respect for others, and use of evidence). My focus here is primarily at the psychological level, giving attention to the teachers' collective thinking, as represented in their conversations. The research questions are open: How did these early career teachers respond to the key words in their conversations? Are there any indications of 'psychological' thinking?

Here is an account of the five short conversations around the key word of 'BELONGING'. All are focused on ideas cumulatively written up on the sheet:

Round 1: The first contribution comes from Teacher 1: 'So, feeling like you're in a safe place'. The discussion then continues between the two teachers in an affirmative and personal way:

Teacher 2: Yes, feeling like you're being in a safe place. That everyone matters, everyone belongs, not just some people.

Teacher 1: Feeling like it's a family, almost

Teacher 2: Yes, I definitely agree with that. Actually, my headmistress came in and said, 'Oh, it's like a little family in here.' She said that to my class.

Teacher 1: Sharing happiness, sharing things.

Teacher 2: Yes, that's good, sharing. If you feel excluded that someone is actually going to be there, that you have support.

This part of the conversation focuses almost entirely on feelings, sharing, supporting and ensuring that people are involved. It is only towards the end of this first round that mention is made of academic learning, and the focus here is on ensuring that learning tasks are appropriate for the children. The teachers acknowledge that this is hard, though, especially if this leads to dividing children into groups based on their attainment:

Teacher 1: ... I'm just thinking that there are some children who feel that they are in the wrong. So, we set them for maths and they feel like, because they're in the bottom group, they don't feel that they belong there. So, academically they might belong there, but they feel that they're in the wrong place

Round 2: The next pair of teachers agrees that 'the safe place is fundamental' and 'paramount'. As with the first pair the conversation turns to their own classroom experience and the strategies they use to enhance children's feelings of safety and belonging.

Teacher 3: I would definitely say in my classroom ... the 'safe place' is fundamental.

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Teacher 4: Paramount, yes.

Teacher 3: Because in my room I know from last year that was not the case for my children.

Teacher 4: Really?

Teacher 3: This year straightaway the anxieties that are coming in, don't feel safe in their room. So, really trying to support that feeling of belonging and scaffold them into feeling they belong in that room.

Their conversation turns to the children's 'ownership' of the classroom and how this can support their increasing independence as learners.

Teacher 4: Yes, I think that sounds good to me. I know it sounds like your jargonistic way of approaching it, but the ownership of the room, so they get to change the actual environment themselves. So, when we develop the environment, we put in new things like role play areas, they have a big say in that. As a result, it means that it's their room and it's an environment that they're not surprised by coming in, only on a special day where we might have done something for them. But it's actually gradually becoming theirs and theirs.

Teacher 3: Building onto that, if they feel they belong and that classroom belongs to them, they become more independent as learners.

The two teachers then read through the previous pair's notes, agreeing with all that is written. They decide to add 'child-initiated' and 'being welcome', which '...is something that we do quite well'.

The two teachers then begin to articulate their principles, although these do not yet emerge clearly in their conversation

Teacher 4: It's a concept, a kind of philosophy for me, anyway, beyond the things. I can see how the work comes into it, but, for me, it's very much your approach.

Teacher 3: Yes, psychological thing as well, because it can become, if they feel you're in control of the whole space, it then goes on a hierarchy as well, where they're totally on balance.

This leads them to discuss question of 'voice' and 'control'. They touch on the question of who retains the control in class, agreeing that this goes to the teacher in the end. They agree that the concepts on the sheet are 'nicely linked'.

One also remarks further on the 'sharing' notion already present on the sheet: Teacher 3: 'Yes, and I think with sharing it could be sharing space as well and sharing knowledge'.

Round 3: The arrival of the third pair adds new reference to 'community' and '...feeling that your ideas are valued as much as anyone else's'.

Teacher 5: Belonging? A sense of belonging? So, feeling as though you're part of the class.

Teacher 6: Part of the community.

Teacher 5: And part of the wider community. That's true. Feeling that your ideas are valued as much as anybody else's.

They then turn their conversation to religion:

Teacher 5: Also, in terms of, if you're looking from an RE (*religious education*) perspective, your sense of belonging and how it differs, perhaps, from other people, how they see belonging, like belonging to a religion. I don't know. Not just your community, belonging to a faith.

Their brief discussion of faith groups leads them to consider any groups and the implications for children '...who don't have friends, who feel like outsiders, because of whatever reason'. They continue thinking about belonging in terms of whether the feeling of belonging arises '...when you share similar interests...or when you're taken seriously...that you matter..and that you're cared for', bringing in an example from their own classroom:

Teacher 5: Yes. I think children want to belong, in the sense that they want to have similar things that other children are having and like similar things, maybe, links to friends. For instance, one girl in our class decided she wanted to wear a different coloured pair of tights, because her friend had them. She wanted to feel like she belonged in that room.

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Teacher 6: Yes. They do need to feel secure, then, don't they?

Teacher 5: Yes, maybe.

They conclude their conversation reflecting on the questions of security and whether children want to stand out', noting in the end that

Teacher 6: It's not often a child really wants to stand out, is it?

Teacher 5: Similar interests. Yes, that's true.

Teacher 6: It's hard.

Teacher 5: But, then, is that something that we promote as teachers, that everybody does one answer, maybe sometimes? I don't know. Maybe that's promoted that everybody needs to be doing a similar thing, like the behaviour management. So, maybe that's belonging.

Round 4: The fourth pair of teachers are immediately attracted to what is already written down about 'feeling safe', and one of them adds the word 'nurturing'. They then strike out in two directions: one teacher follows a line of thinking about 'feeling that you can speak your mind' while the other heads in the direction of learning (perhaps reflecting their conversation about another key word encountered in previous rounds)

Teacher 7: I think if you belong somewhere you feel like you can speak your mind.

Teacher 8: Yes, exactly. And you have to feel that you can belong before you can participate or learn.

These teachers then continue to read and comment on the nearly full sheet of ideas, adding their ideas about the need for respect and sensitivity to children's different backgrounds. They take this further in reflecting on the need to be sensitive when children are '... taken out of class to do things'. Teacher 7 extends this point to reflect on the difficulties of integration between environments. The teachers conclude by building on previous ideas with a sense of completion on the sheet, adding references to peers, family and friends. They check that mention has been of 'thinking you're valued' and 'having a voice'. Their final contribution is to extend the general notion of 'family' to consider the involvement of children's parents and the wider

community in school, noting the difficulties and dilemmas of control that can arise:

Teacher 8: Yes, because in our school we struggle a lot with getting parents in and doing stuff with the community, because there is this big barrier. I guess it's because the parents feel that they don't belong in school, because they've had a negative experience of that. So, they don't really want to come in ever for anything. If they do, they will want to be in and out as soon as they can.

Teacher 7: Sometimes it's difficult because the parents aren't allowed to come in, in the morning, but then we want to be like an open school. So it's that conflict.

Round 5: In the final round the first pair return to the sheet that they started off, and they are asked to select one or two points to feed back to the whole group. They comment first on the ideas that they like, such as 'child-initiated' and 'multiple voices'. They also identify ideas they don't understand such as 'control' and 'hierarchy', which prompts further conversation and co-construction as they try to work out what it could mean:

Teacher 1: I don't understand this one.

Teacher 2: I know. I don't understand 'control' or 'hierarchy' either.

Teacher 1: I suppose you get the safe place by having control of the classroom as a teacher, because, if the classroom is not under control, then it's not a safe place.

Teacher 2: I guess I don't think teachers can control the classroom. I think teachers can...

Teacher 1: ... manage it.

Teacher 2: Well, the children are only, at the end of the day, have control over, really get control children. They choose to control themselves.

Teacher 1: Yes, but that's still through how you set up and manage that.

Teacher 2: Yes, exactly, how I manage it.....

In the end they select 'a safe place' as their 'favourite', remembering that

one of them had offered this idea originally. They complete their argument as follows:

Teacher 1: Yes, exactly, how I manage it. Did you like that, ‘a safe place’?

Teacher 2: I did it.

Teacher 1: I like that. I think that’s probably my favourite one. I’m going to put a star beside it. I like that one. I do. I think that is.

Teacher 2: Because I think all those other things are possible steps from it. If a child chooses to participate, it’s because they feel safe.

Teacher 1: Yes, absolutely

This series of short conversations about ‘belonging’ has been presented in detail to demonstrate how rapidly and fluently the teachers built on each other’s ideas within and between each short round of conversation. The teachers’ talk has largely ‘cumulative’ features, meaning that they mostly accept other’s ideas and elaborate on them in an affirming way. They tend not to adopt the questioning, critical evaluation or challenging approaches typical of the ‘exploratory talk’ that is associated more strongly with collective reasoning and problem-solving (Littleton and Mercer, 2013). This seems unsurprising given the nature of the activity and its role early in the project. Indeed, Littleton and Mercer remark on the value of cumulative talk in certain stages of joint creative activity (p.58).

The teachers bring different types of knowledge into the conversations, often starting with what seems to be initial free word association and extending to the inclusion of personal anecdotes, with occasional reference to more formal theoretical ideas and terminology. They touch on many psychologically relevant ideas, with particular reference to feeling safe, feelings of belonging, feeling excluded, feeling in the wrong place, children’s needs to feel secure, and so on. There are also theoretical propositions, as when Teacher 3 connects children’s feelings of belonging with becoming independent learners, Teacher 6 suggests that children do not often really want to stand out, and Teacher 8 says ‘...you have to feel like you can belong before you can participate and learn’.

In all four key word conversations a great many ideas appeared in a very

short space of time. For instance, approximately 75 different ideas appeared in the conversation about ‘LEARNING’, without counting repetitions (see Table 1)

Table 1:

Ideas and concepts emerging in teachers’ conversations about ‘LEARNING’

Rounds of conversation involving teacher pairs (P1-4)	Main ideas and concepts expressed by teachers in conversation about LEARNING (not including repetitions within each round)
Round 1 (P1)	Knowledge; Lessons; Social and academic; Emotional; Progress; Data; Talking; Collaboration; Life skills; Social skills; Friends; Play
Round 2 (P2 – had previously discussed ‘belonging’)	Progress; Getting better; Understanding; Lifelong education; Lifelong learning; Common sense; Feeling good about your work; Pride in your work; Enjoyment; Self-efficacy – it’s in your control; From each other; Adults and pupils; Non-hierarchical; Motivation
Round 3 (P3 – had previously discussed ‘participation’ and then ‘belonging’)	Building together; Safe environment for exploration; Behaviour; Pressure (from management or Ofsted (<i>i.e. school inspection</i>)); Children knowing boundaries; Understanding their realm; Developing personalities; Self-esteem; Accessing learning; Engaging learning; Enjoyment and challenge
Round 4 (P4 – had previously discussed ‘diversity’, ‘participation’ and ‘belonging’)	In different ways; Participating; Learning in different forms (like learning through play); Social learning; Kinaesthetic learning; Visual; Stages of learning; ‘Extend, extend, extend’; Learning support; Measuring learning; Feeling of belonging; Enthusiasm; Learning how to learn; Being independent; Self-regulators; Learning to be a kind person; Us (teachers) learning; Parents learning; Home life learning; Rote vs exploration; Deeper understanding
Round 5 (P1 – i.e. the original pair, returning after discussing ‘diversity’, ‘participation’ and ‘belonging’)	Enjoyment; ‘Every child matters’; Life skills; Learning how to learn; Meta-learning; Learning muscles: collaboration, empathy, problem-solving, reasoning and meta-learning; Not spoon-feeding; Independence and autonomy; Knowing how to interact

When considered through a broadly ‘psychological’ lens some interesting questions may come up about all these conversations. One of the most basic is to ask how the words themselves are being understood and used. It is striking that different topics of conversation emerge in response to each key word. The ‘BELONGING’ conversation gave precedence throughout to feeling safe, sharing, support and enjoyment, eliciting at least some of the teachers’ beliefs about essential relational conditions for learning. Connections to learning are acknowledged, mainly in terms of increasing independence, and the discussion develops towards questions of ownership, voice and control. In contrast, the ‘DIVERSITY’ key word conversation started with discussion about different religions, cultures, languages, and socio-economic status. Reference is made to classroom learning, but in terms of the relevance of ‘ability’, ‘learning needs’ ‘gifted and talented’. Final emphasis is given to ‘understanding that people are different and unique’. The key word ‘PARTICIPATION’ prompted initial conversation about active learning in the classroom, choice, decision-making and active participation in democratic school life, and the associated needs for communication and understanding. The lengthiest discussion here was actually about the dilemmas and limits of children’s active participation in school. One teacher in an earlier round had described a ‘no hands up’ policy in her school, indicating that everyone is expected to participate in class discussion chosen randomly by the teacher. A later pair, who had been first in the BELONGING conversation above, comment on this point in Round 4:

Teacher 2: What do you think about this ‘no hands up’ thing?

Teacher 1: What, whether it’s participation or whether it’s a good idea?

Teacher 2: Is it participation, because actually isn’t the teacher forcing participation? Are the children choosing to participate or is the teacher saying ‘I’m making you’? You have a right to silence.

This debate continues for a while, with a final philosophical question: ‘Is a classroom a democracy or is it a dictator?’

While I was reflecting on how these teachers responded to each other in conversation, and bearing in mind the psychological focus of this paper, certain words came to my mind, including: ‘lexical’ and ‘priming’. These are not areas of psychological research that I know much about, but I

suspected a vast research field. This led me to search psychological literature (using the database PsycINFO) for research on ‘lexical’ and ‘priming’ effects that could possibly offer insight into what happens when people talk about inclusive pedagogy in this way, and I made a quick selection of articles that caught my eye. These very different articles drew my attention to such topics as: the effects of people’s beliefs about the person they are talking to (Branigan, et al 2011) and the relevance of prior relationships (Ahnert et al, 2013); the activation of ‘real-world’ knowledge by specific words (Hare et al, 2009); the different types of relationship between pairs of words (Jones and Golonka, 2012); about effects of relevant knowledge on the originality ideas generated in ‘brainstorming’ (Rietzchel, Nijstad and Stroebe, 2007); and the evolution of nurses’ concepts of hospital hygiene over the course of training (Salès-Wuillemin, et al 2011). This rather random set of studies refers to children and adults in different contexts (several in laboratories), and there are no direct applications to inclusive education. However, the process of searching certainly extended my thinking in ways that I could decide to pursue if they seem helpful to understand how people talk about inclusion, just as other lines of reading could do the same for different purposes.

This section has raised questions about how people can share ideas and come to understand each other in conversation. I have also touched on the knowledge that can be incorporated and developed in dialogue both in direct conversation with others and in virtual dialogue with published work. Both seem relevant to understanding the foundations of constructive and productive dialogue about inclusive education.

Conclusion: Inclusive Education, Dialogue and Psychology

In this paper I have begun to consider whether and how psychological thinking may contribute to the dialogues essential for developing inclusive education, with particular reference to classroom practice and teachers’ thinking in inclusive pedagogy. This is intrinsically a dialogic process in that its meaning and practices involve the engagement of different perspectives, and it is likely to need continual rethinking and innovation. When considering the experience of educational change, I would follow Fullan

(2007) in saying that there is no getting round the ‘primacy of personal contact’ for teachers to develop shared understanding, moral commitment, trust and coping capacities. Teachers ‘... need to have one-to-one and group opportunities to receive and give help and more simply to *converse* about the meaning of change’. (p.139).

Given the remaining disciplinary ‘wars’, it may be that the inclusion of psychological thinking in this area is better expressed in terms of including thinking that draws on ideas, information and knowledge that people who define themselves as psychologists have also been concerned with over the years. This could help to acknowledge common interests and avoid disciplinary arguments. Boundaries around ‘psychology’ can certainly add to the difficulties of applying psychological knowledge in education, not just because of the concerned skepticism about testing and scientific method mentioned at the start of this paper. It can also be a problem if, as (Hick, Kershner and Farrell, 2009, p. 4) suggest with regard to the extensive educational adoption of concepts like ‘learning style’: ‘The educational “usefulness” of psychology comes to be determined by the success of “non-psychologists” in applying snippets of psychological knowledge and procedures that have somehow gained cultural value’.

It is also important to see that psychological ideas can change over time, sometimes with significant shifts in thinking. Sheehy (2013) points out that psychologists themselves are a heterogeneous group, who adopt different discourses and hold different beliefs that have direct influence on building knowledge about inclusive education through research. This can have methodological impact if new types of quantitative and qualitative evidence gain weight and value. There may also be conceptual change, as we see in Bruner’s (2012) reflections on the development of his lab-based work on perception. He concludes that we each look at the world in ways that reflect our situations, expectations, cultural orientations and capacities to construct possible worlds that transcend biological constraints:

‘...do our conventional psychological methods of research – the laboratory, the conventional interview, standardized tests, and the rest – do these take such considerations into account? A psychologist can learn a lesson or two from the anthropologist, the sociologist, even the historian. We will never understand human

behavior simply by studying it in vitro or out of context, without taking account of the uneasy historical compromise that exists between the Established and the Possible.’ (p.9)

There is of course existing research that establishes the relevance of psychological theory for understanding likely components of educational inclusion, such as Rose & Norwich’s (2014) adoption of social psychological theories of group processes and efficacy beliefs in looking at the resolution of dilemmas in inter-professional work, to name just one. It is also useful to refer to different psychological theories of learning, development and individual difference when considering possibilities for assessment, including psychometric, behavioural, developmental, cognitive, constructivist, humanist, ecological and self-focused approaches (Bourke & Mentis, 2014). We can be open to traditional forms and areas of psychological research while also considering new directions for psychology that will be particularly relevant to educational inclusion. This is likely to involve psychologists in adopting critical approaches that start from social justice principles, less defensiveness about the discipline, and more active engagement in interdisciplinary approaches (Dyson and Howes, 2009; Hick, 2009).

In any case there may be no need to put a boundary around different topics or imply disciplinary ownership. The field of inclusive education seems to be a good candidate for interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches to research and practice, and it is encouraging and exciting to imagine that such work in the field of inclusive education too could lead to new forms of research and new ways of thinking (Darbellay, 2014). Klein (2014) remarks on the overlapping discourses of transdisciplinarity, from its emergence in the 1970s, with a concern for ‘imaging futures’ in the human, social, technical and natural sciences. She draws attention to the transdisciplinary imperatives of transcendence, problem solving and transgression that play out in an eclectic mix of global and individual projects, relating variously to the study of climate change, architecture, poverty and so on. Education in general, and inclusive education specifically, would seem to be thirsty for such initiatives. To take one example, we might look at the conditions for productive dialogue at different and complementary levels of analysis:

- the power structures and social conditions influencing participation in productive dialogue about educational inclusion
- the means of communication, motivations and social relationships that enable and prompt people to engage with each other to develop more just and equitable educational systems
- the use of tools to support dialogue, helping to articulate assumptions, concepts and actions for inclusive pedagogy in particular contexts (e.g. Florian, 2014)

In conclusion, I have argued that educational inclusion requires conversations and dialogic engagement between all involved. I would add that these face to face and written discussions are potentially enriched by the incorporation of knowledge and understanding gained from relevant psychological and transdisciplinary research that is itself inclusive.

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