
Integrated but not included: exploring quiet disaffection in mainstream schools in China and India

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In recent decades, inclusion as an international trend has had a tremendous impact on the education systems of developing countries including China and India. Perspectives on inclusive education have been constantly modified with increased awareness and understanding of the diverse needs of children. Research as well as theories and policies have shown significant advancement in the practices of both countries (Chen, 1996; Ainscow, 1999; Potts, 2003; Jangira, 2002). However, inclusion, due to the demands and multi-dimensional influences of different education systems, has unique cultural-specific features in these two developing countries.

School disaffection is often defined in terms of disruptive behaviour (Cooper, 1993; Hope, 2006), truancy (Elliott, 1997) or resigned acceptance (Dorn, 1996) resulting from an inadequate addressing of the educational needs of diverse pupils. Some studies view disaffection as a product of local and family influences that might be in conflict with established educational expectations (Hallam *et al*, 2006; Rose and Jones, 2007). Others suggest that disaffection can be demonstrated quietly rather than in terms of deviant behaviour (Nardi and Steward, 2003). However, research largely 'ignores a group of students whose disaffection is expressed in a tacit, non-disruptive manner, namely as disengagement and invisibility' whose 'characteristics include tedium, isolation, rote learning, elitism and depersonalisation' (Nardi and Steward, 2003:345). Quietly disaffected pupils can be those who attend school but often underachieve. They may find that schools fail to address their needs, interests and experiences. As a consequence of this, they develop a sense of alienation from key adults and withdraw from activities or display lack of confidence. This can lead to low engagement with learning due to

their perception of school as irrelevant to their future world. They may demonstrate their disaffection by silence instead of disruptive behaviour, acting out or truancy (Rudduck *et al*, 1996).

This paper quotes the qualitative data from one author's recent research (Feng, 2006, 2007) in China and the other author's ongoing PhD research in India. Both studies used multi-methods of data collection in mainstream school settings. This paper discusses the relatively under-researched topic of 'quiet disaffection' of pupils with diverse educational needs in mainstream schools in China and India. It follows the description by Rudduck *et al*, (1996) that some pupils are quietly and invisibly disaffected. The paper argues that integration – rather than inclusion – in the learning contexts in these two countries is the main source of this kind of disaffection in schools. It further identifies issues relating to ability grouping, school curriculum, teaching strategies, empowerment and whole-school approaches for the provision of inclusive education. Recommendations are made to better address the needs of disaffected pupils in order to more fully engage them in schools.

Inclusive education in China

The development of inclusive education in China has been given impetus since 1986 following the Nine Year Compulsory Educational Laws of China (MoE, 1986: Article 9). Education *as a fundamental right for all children to have free access to compulsory education* is guaranteed by the Chinese constitution. The Chinese version of inclusive education (Deng and Manset, 2000), has increased the education opportunities for children with special educational needs while it has also highlighted some weaknesses in Chinese educational provision. Widespread confusion and a lack of common understanding about integration and inclusion are evident from the literature from China (Chen, 1996). While many

pupils in China demonstrate school disaffection in ways commonly identified in literature, research and practice, quiet disaffection in schools has not yet received significant attention (Feng, 1999). As a consequence, quietly disaffected pupils are integrated into schools but are not fully included in learning.

Sources of quiet disaffection in Zhejiang schools

Recent research (Feng, 2006, 2007) revealed the multi-dimensional issues of quiet disaffection in schools in China's Zhejiang province.

The huge population of the country has led to China's emergence as an extremely competitive society in which the most able pupils are given added attention and resourcing while less able pupils are left behind. Designated 'key schools' exist for selected learners at every educational level (Feng, 2007) with entry based on examinations, academic promise and achievement. The success of the key schools has too often been measured solely in terms of college placement of its pupils rather than on more objective measurements of learning. Ability-grouping is widespread and large class sizes encourage didactic teaching approaches. These circumstances challenge the ability of teachers to provide sufficient attention to individuals who may be struggling academically or who are disengaged from learning. All these conditions lead to the restriction of learning opportunities for pupils in lower ability sets. They also lead to pupils in top sets learning at a pace which can be, for many pupils, incompatible with understanding (Boaler, William and Brown, 2000). While pupils in top sets are the focus of the attention, as are those pupils with disruptive behavioural problems, pupils who are quiet or are low academic achievers are easily ignored in class.

Joy: My class teacher, also my math teacher, she just likes students who are good at math. If she

thinks you are clever and you have talent in studying math, then even if you are a naughty student, she'll talk to you, and tell you that she expects you to be a high achieving student. Then she will always help you, even though, sometimes, you are wrong! But others have to suffer... Case student (Feng, 2006)

A narrow curriculum and inappropriate teaching strategies result in diminished enjoyment and progressive demotivation for some pupils, including the most able (Gotch and Ellis, 2006). Sebba *et al* (1995) also suggest that teachers believe that if pupils do not learn it is because they have a problem which demands remediation through special techniques or a different curricular focus. In addition, teaching strategies centred on the transfer of particular sets of knowledge and a narrow range of subject-specific academic skills can not provide pupils with the kind of experiences needed (Feng, 1999, 2007).

Anna: *The competition is cruel. The society wants the student to get higher degrees. Although the student does not need the unusual knowledge very much, they have to learn and learn, do more and more homework.* Case student (Feng, 2006)

Helen: *The curriculum is (boring), there's little time for fun subjects. Sometimes I think some of the teachers are hypocritical. For example, they often tell us to take part in the activities to improve our skills, but when there's an activity, they tell us not to take part in it because we have to spend more time studying.* Case student (Feng, 2006)

Thirdly, the voices of pupils with special educational needs in China were seldom heard in the past, though this has changed in recent years. There is an acceptance that a better understanding of children's perspectives is required to remove barriers to their participation and progress in learning (Feng 2006, 2007). However, if pupils are not articulate enough or

do not choose to demonstrate their disaffection in disruptive ways, regardless of the causes, they often lose the attention of teachers. The result is that their disengagement is largely ignored.

Anna: *The voices [of disaffected pupils] give the government pressure, but not very big, I think. The pupils first feel angry and uncomfortable and hate studying, but little by little, they get used to it and become numb. I have an example: one night, our school had an art festival and all the students except we three juniors attended it because we were forced to study all night long. I really didn't think one night was so important for studying as our teachers thought. It was a whole school activity! We felt so angry that we shouted and complained, but none of us dared to speak to the teachers. So, we studied as usual but without concentration. My good friend escaped to see the performance, but was caught by the teacher on her way. I think maybe this event can reflect something. We are angry, but no one can speak up, so we tough it out.* Case student (Feng, 2006)

Lastly but of equal importance, the need is felt in schools in China to create a power-sharing ethos when faced with the challenges of today's schools. However, the whole school approach for improving provision and developing inclusive schooling (Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, 2006) has yet to be introduced and implemented in most Chinese schools.

Inclusive education in Kerala, India

The Government of India (1950) mandated constitutional provision for free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years. While this legislation has underpinned subsequent educational developments within India, in reality there are a large number of school aged children who still receive little or no formal schooling. India, according to a UNESCO report (2005), is one of the 35 countries most unlikely to meet the Education for All goals by

2015 (Singal, 2006). Children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, girls and those with special needs or disabilities are most likely to be excluded from educational provision. Alur (2007) defines inclusive education in India in the following terms:

Inclusion, for us, meant admitting girls suffering from cultural bias, the Dalit child suffering from socio-economic bias, and children with special needs suffering from systemic bias.

However, there are varied and different interpretations of this definition from state to state within the Indian context. For example, in the southern state of Kerala, which is often referred to as the most literate and socially developed state in India (Sen, 2005), this definition has little relevance. There, general school enrolment and retention until class seven (age 12) is almost total. Female children outnumber males and every community, irrespective of caste, religion and socio-economic background, has schools within easily accessible distances. For 'pupils with identified disabilities', regular school placement is 100% (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 2007). However, some learners have not had their special educational needs recognised. This may include, for example, pupils on the autistic spectrum or those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or others with general learning difficulties but without additional disabling characteristics. A lack of recognition of the needs of some of these pupils results in their not being able to fully participate in class. They are present, but not in an inclusive sense, and may be described as quietly disaffected.

Current trends towards inclusive education in India focus upon integrating children with clearly identified special educational needs into mainstream classrooms. But this approach fails to give attention to quietly disaffected pupils who are already present in the classroom. The

causes of their disaffection are not inherent within the child but are more likely to be the result of teachers not adequately recognising these pupils' needs. Significant factors in pupils' needs being overlooked or misunderstood may include cultural and traditional beliefs, insufficiently inclusive policies, societal pressures, pedagogical practices and the expectations of both parents and teachers. These factors and others make schools stressful, emotionally isolating and alienating for many pupils in India (Jangira, 2002).

Sources of quiet disaffection in Kerala schools

The structures and expectations of Kerala society with regards to education in part exacerbate quiet disaffection. Lack of flexibility resulting from a rigid curriculum structure, pre-set syllabuses, classroom organisation and didactic teaching approaches place pressures on teachers who are expected to achieve high academic outcomes from their pupils. This leads to a concentration of teachers' efforts to promote academic achievement in the most able pupils and those who are most ready to respond to the school's level of expectation. This ability to respond is recognised and rewarded by giving additional opportunities to develop pupils' talents and innate abilities. By contrast, those who struggle to gain modest levels of achievement are often left behind and in some instances give up in their struggle to learn. They may become quietly disaffected and withdraw themselves from the learning process.

One teacher: *I was satisfied with the children. There will be as many as five or ten in the class who are very good. They have an interest in learning, homework and whatever work we give them. We are happy to have them in our class and we give them more work. If those children are not here, we feel disappointed. However, we will not get any response from the other children. We will become tired after a while...if*

you (interviewer) ask me whether I have job satisfaction, I would say I cannot get what I deserve.

Those pupils whose alienation is characterised by disruptive behaviour are easily recognised and become labelled as badly behaved and ‘hopeless.’ They are treated with coercive measures, are subjected to negative comments and may be dealt with through inappropriate sanctions and punishments. However, those who react by becoming introverted and withdrawn will often be ignored and their disaffection overlooked. To summarise the position, one teacher indicated:

[He] will not sit quietly. A kind of restlessness...even though I try to tell him and make him sit in the class, using the cane sometimes – we have to – he will break the normality and disturb the other children. He cannot sit calmly and quietly ... what can I do? We cannot take care of all children in any way.

Whilst pupils who are quietly disaffected may not have specific learning difficulties or behavioural problems, they may at times be recognised as having attention disorders. There are large numbers of such learners who disengage from learning and sit in the class only out of a sense of obligation and a certain recognition of the need to conform. They may not experience any real enjoyment or satisfaction from any kind of classroom activity (Nardi and Steward, 2003) and are systematically excluded from these activities, as the teachers are committed to looking after the needs of the most able learners or those whose disruption is overt and acted out. Their lack of engagement in learning is tacitly encouraged by teachers who interpret their quiet disaffection as being symptomatic of quiet, conformist children who make minimal demands upon teacher time.

Discussion

Quietly disaffected pupils in China and India are integrated but not fully included in their classrooms. Many educational psychologists place an over-emphasis on observable behaviours but have not yet focused their attention on pupils whose disaffection is manifested by withdrawn behaviour. It would appear that the causes of quiet disaffection in both countries are similar and may be summarised in the following terms:

School curriculum structures

- A standardised and inflexible curriculum which lacks in breadth, balance and relevance can lead to disengagement (Smith, 2003) and may ultimately be a major cause of quiet disaffection.
- An overtly academic curriculum can be exclusive and inhibit social interaction for some pupils.
- A focus upon testing which measures academic performance while ignoring issues of sociability, individual needs and achievements quickly leads to the alienation of less able pupils or those who lack confidence (Solomon and Rogers, 2001).
- Large class sizes and high pupil to adult ratios, which means that curriculum individualisation and the development of flexible teaching strategies become challenging, can exacerbate the situation for those who are less able or vocal.

Culture-specific factors

In both countries teachers are highly respected as sources and transmitters of knowledge. This status is such that there is an expectation that pupils will conform and respond to the approaches adopted by teachers. This has resulted in pupils’ lack of chances or motivations in questioning teachers or seeking clarification of their learning. In the research in Zhejiang

province, the data indicate that the fear of losing face in front of a class leads to teachers being wary about adopting approaches seen as anything less than authoritative. For students, asking questions for clarification of aspects of learning may be seen as risking their credibility in front of their peers. In Kerala as well, teachers are perceived as the sole authorities in the classroom. Pupils are expected to be dependent, polite, obedient and respectful of authority (Koul and Fisher, 2002).

Pupil empowerment: The pupil voice is largely unheard or responded to in schools in Chinese and Indian schools, indicating learners' lack of confidence to confront their own learning needs in class. Limited opportunities for social interaction between peers impedes the development of the interactive and independent learning skills of the less confident (Slavin, 1995). Pupils who are not able to demonstrate their academic achievements are often ignored. This becomes the driving force for their disengagement with the general activity of the class (Soudien, 2006). School rules which are enforced, in some instances, through strict disciplinary measures can lead to a lack of pupil confidence which may eventually contribute to quiet disaffection of some learners.

Recommendations for the future

It is clear that not all pupils need the same curriculum (Farrell, 1997; Rayner, 1998; McLaughlin and Tilstone, 2000). What is needed is a curriculum that is relevant and of immediate concern to them, broad and balanced in a real sense with a commitment to personal learning and not just passing tests. Disaffected and bored pupils can be re-motivated and inspired when learning styles, content and focus are directed by teachers to meet pupils' needs, interests and expectations.

Children and young people with special educational needs have a unique knowledge of

their own needs and therefore their voices should be encouraged and listened to (Shevlin and Rose, 2003). Teacher knowledge and understanding of diverse sources of school disaffection must be reinforced through the development of initial teacher education and professional development to support and encourage inclusion. While extensive studies have focused on the area of school disaffection with regard to disruptive behaviour, truancy and/or resigned acceptance, future research should also draw attention to the effective engagement of quietly disaffected pupils. Until such time as this is addressed, a significant number of pupils will continue to be physically integrated but not fully included.

Note

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