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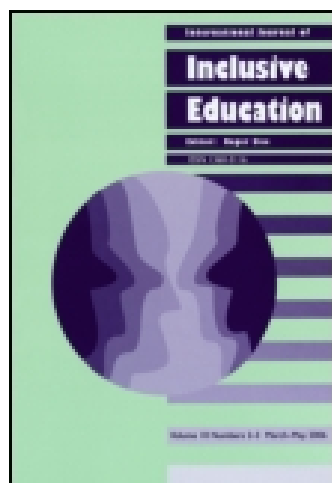


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Is this inclusion? Lessons from a very ‘special’ unit

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Debates about the meanings of inclusive education are long-lasting, and the imperative to include disabled students in mainstream schools is currently under threat by the UK government’s educational policies. This paper draws on critiques from inclusive education and critical pedagogy literature, as well as on findings from field research in a special unit in a secondary school in the UK, to argue for a thorough change in educational provision that is currently incompatible with notions of inclusion. The paper examines how changing the politics of disability, access and relations of belonging in the context of field research has had a positive impact on educational provision in accordance with critiques of education from disability, feminist and anti-capitalist standpoints. However, while the educational provision in the school’s special unit successfully challenged many disabling barriers to education, its lack of engagement with issues of power and wider social structures made it vulnerable to recuperation. The paper points to the relevance of including ideas from critical pedagogy within research and practice in inclusive education, which provide a useful tool for dealing with such issues.

Keywords: curriculum and instruction; disability; inclusive education; politics of education; special education needs

Introduction

The legal imperative for inclusive education, which has long been fought for by parents’ and disabled people’s organisations, and supported (at least on paper) by UK governments in the past two decades, is now being challenged. The Education Act (1996), which requires local educational authorities to place children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools where it is compatible with efficient education and the efficient use of resources, was supplemented by government policies aiming ‘to make education more innovative and responsive to the diverse needs of individual children, so reducing our reliance on separate SEN structures’ (DfES 2004, introduction). Despite this legislation, more than 40% of pupils with statements of SEN¹ continue to be educated in segregated settings (DFE 2012), and there is evidence that many parents of pupils with SEN who study in mainstream schools are unsatisfied with the educational provision available to them (DCSF 2009). With the change of government in the UK in 2010, a new policy on SEN has been introduced, aiming to ‘remove the bias towards inclusion’ and ‘prevent the unnecessary closure of special schools’ (DFE 2011, 5). This was framed in the policy as a way of giving

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parents more choice and control over the educational provision for their children in what was considered a response to their frustration and dissatisfaction.

While these changes to governmental policy are strongly opposed by disabled people's organisations in the UK, the incompatibility of much neo-liberal educational policy with the principles of inclusion has been critiqued by many researchers and campaigners who are committed to the struggle for inclusive education (e.g. Slee 1997; Gabel 2002; Goodley 2007; Allan 2008; Lloyd 2008; Goodley 2011). Far from merely asking where pupils are placed and with which classmates, such critics challenge the basic assumptions and definitions of mainstream education, which they argue are inherently disabling. The main argument of this paper is that our thinking about inclusive education could be broadened by drawing insights from critical pedagogy, a field of thought that aims to challenge the reproduction of social inequalities in education and to use education as a tool for social change. The first part of the paper explores these exclusionary aspects of mainstream schooling and points to the relevance of critical pedagogy to the creation of socially just and inclusive education. The second part of the paper draws on these theoretical ideas to analyse data from research in an innovative 'special' unit of a secondary school in a highly socially deprived community in the UK.

The exclusionary basis of mainstream schooling

State schooling in Britain emerged in the nineteenth century as part of the vast economic, political and social changes that followed the Industrial Revolution. Changes such as rapid urbanisation (Ball 2008) and the rise to prominence of the professions (Skrtic 1995) had an important role in the construction of schooling and even of childhood (Burman 2006). Similarly, researchers in disability studies identify these changes as the onset of modern-day disability exclusion (Oliver 1990a) and the origin of the idea of the 'norm' as applied to human existence (Davis 1995). Burman (2006) shows how the professional discourses of pedagogy and developmental psychology play a major role in bridging the contradictions between democratic ideology and the widening inequalities of global capitalism. These discourses portray development as a natural and universal ascent up a ladder, which leads children from a needy place associated with dependency, irrationality and vulnerability to the state of rational, autonomous, self-regulating and responsible citizens. By positioning at the top of the ladder traits culturally associated with the rational, white, Western, middle-class man, 'the child, the woman, the native/savage along with other rejects from the modern development project of productivity – the "mental defective and degenerate"' are devalued, and their underprivileged status is naturalised (Burman 2006, 646).

Skrtic (1995) points to the inherently disabling nature of education that is based on a functionalist paradigm. Functionalism presupposes that social reality is objective, inherently orderly and rational, and thus that social and human problems are pathological. Under such assumptions, the field of special education emerged as a means to remove and contain the most recalcitrant students. In a process that can be described as 'pigeonholing', the special education professional matches a presumed client need to one of the standard practices in his or her repertoire or refers them to a different service, in the interest of maintaining order in the rationalised school (Skrtic 1995). Even when policies call for the education of disabled students alongside their non-disabled peers, processes of pigeonholing continue to dominate their education. Many teachers feel unprepared for working with disabled students, and many teacher

preparation programmes seek to rectify this by providing future teachers with more and more ‘specialised’ knowledge about different diagnostic labels (Florian and Rouse 2010). However, there is little evidence in support of such ‘diagnostic-perspective teaching’, and many teachers feel that teaching pupils who receive ‘specialised support’ is beyond their abilities or responsibility (Florian and Rouse 2010; Kaikkonen 2010), thus marginalising students even when they are educated within the mainstream classroom.

SEN and the commodification of education

Neo-liberal reforms to education are set within a model of marketisation of human potential that ties responsibilities for welfare and well-being to the economically productive individual and family (Lipman 2009). They constitute students and families as consumers, equity as measuring against national standards, freedom as consumer choice, and ‘good’ or ‘worthy’ education as managerially effective (Burman 2006). Current educational policies in the UK (and elsewhere) include frequent testing of attainment against national standards and norms; publicising schools’ league tables and the encouragement of ‘consumer choice’ by parents and students combined with a system of punishments and rewards for failing and successful schools; the elaboration of managerial responsibilities and control over budgets and staff; and the notion of accountability of teachers, students and families through, for example, home-school contracts (Ball 2008). Benjamin (2002) points to the contradictions inherent in the policy for inclusion which proposes that children with SEN should participate fully with their peers in all aspects of school life, when schools themselves are dominated by the need to compete against each other in the league tables and by the continuous drive towards improvement against national standards. Full participation for children with SEN means that they are inevitably set against their peers in a competitive race where they are doomed to fail. By adhering to a functionalist model that defines school failure as an individual pathology, schools can resolve the inherent tension of the demand to achieve above average on national norms through excluding individual students who do not ‘measure up’, either to a different school or to a specialist programme within the school. Ironically, although the intention in diagnostic assessments is to ‘level the playing field’, tests have become instruments to confirm unconscious assumptions about the unacceptability of some students and to legitimate their exclusion (Aspis 1998; Reid and Weatherly Valle 2004). Thus, an inclusive educational policy requires a move away from functionalism, testing and competition, to foster ideals of cooperation, and to see education as a unique relational process that cannot be reduced to universal standardisation.

SEN and the ‘banking model’ of education

Another major aspect of educational policy is the National Curriculum, which was introduced by the Conservative government in 1988, and continued to play a major role in New Labour policies (Ball 2008). The National Curriculum centrally prescribes what is to be taught, and the methods and measurements by which students are assessed. It is set under a functionalist and positivist view of knowledge as a certain and objective body of facts about a single reality that is independent of humans’ apprehension (Skrtic 1995). This leads to what Freire (1972) calls the ‘banking concept of education’, a model in which the role of the teacher is understood as a neutral

transference of knowledge to students. The good teacher needs to effectively break down and deliver ‘packages of knowledge’, and the good student needs to patiently receive, memorise, and repeat that knowledge.

Critical pedagogy criticises this view of knowledge as a single reality, and argues that ‘knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations’ (McLaren 2009, 63). This means that knowledge is created within social structures and has a social function in maintaining or challenging those structures. Policies that call for inclusive education while ignoring the power knowledge relations try to integrate students into an oppressive structure rather than aiming to transform that structure. The ‘single reality’ reflected in the national curriculum often represents white, middle-class culture, which might be different from the culture and knowledge that students bring from home. As under the ‘banking model’ of education, students are confined to the role of the receiver and ‘non-knower’, they are not invited to bring the knowledge they already have to class, and are required to demonstrate knowledge only in prescribed ways, often relying on written tests. When students do not come from a background of the dominant culture, or do not express their knowledge in culturally normative ways, they are left alone to bridge any gaps and contradictions between home and school. This may lead to considerable difficulties with learning the curriculum, and to the identification of such students as having SEN (Reid and Weatherly Valle 2004).

Critical pedagogues offer a model of education that aims to bring about a change in the life of the learner (Freire 1972; Giroux 2003; Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009; McLaren 2009). As we live within a social context, change often involves recognising connections between individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. This is a needed first step of ‘praxis’, which is defined as the power and ‘know-how’ to take action against oppression. Social transformation is the product of praxis at the collective level (Freire 1972; McLaren 2009). Regarding SEN and disability, as Goodley (2011) argues, schools should aim to challenge ‘the tyranny of disabling environments and ableist embodied knowledge and practices’ (Marks 1999, 133). Pedagogy must promote understandings of disability not as a constituency of special education but as the product of a hostile environment and organisational pathology (Ware 2009), and encourage disabled and non-disabled students to take action against disabling and oppressive social structures.

Another problematic feature of the functionalist, banking approach to education is that it values a narrow range of intellectual abilities, and in particular literacy and numeracy, to the exclusion of other vital human capacities, such as building and handy work, art and movement, and capabilities of love, care and solidarity, which are not recognised or appreciated by schools, and are underpaid or unpaid in the job world (Lynch 2001; Lynch and Baker 2005). Feminists have long argued that relegating care work and care relationships, often associated with women, to the private sphere renders them unseen, unvalued and often unexamined, and called for the promotion of an ethics of care (Tronto 1993; hooks 2000). Leaving relations of care unexamined often supports a model of individual independence and ignores questions of power such as who should be cared for, or who can and should do care work. Such assumptions have exclusionary effects on many people, including women, disabled people and migrant workers (Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005). Feminist critical pedagogues call for the development of ‘engaged pedagogy’ (hooks 1994) that values the development of unique relationships between all members of the learning community, teachers and students alike. Yet, it is important to remember that any relationship takes place within already existing, and often extremely unequal, relations of power (Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011).

Focusing on individual relationships without taking account of wider social structure may also have an exclusionary effect on disabled students. The ability of schools to function as communities of belonging regardless of attainment on any specific measurement is a key aspect of inclusive education (Howe 1996). As McGregor and Mills (2012) show, fostering a broad and supportive relationship between students and staff has a crucial role in creating belonging and fostering educational engagement of excluded pupils. Further, as Allan (1999) argues, peers are often gatekeepers to inclusion, and the active process of seeking inclusion should not overlook peer relations. Thus, inclusive education requires much more than the presence of disabled students in the same classroom as non-disabled peers.

To be really inclusive, the core values and assumptions of education need to be challenged. A functionalist outlook and the tying of education to economic and market rationalities do not go hand in hand with the inclusion of disabled students, and indeed other marginalised groups. Thus, several researchers in disability studies have called for the incorporation of ideas from critical pedagogy in our thinking about inclusion (Erevelles 2000; Gabel 2002; Goodley 2007; Ware 2009; Goodley 2011). This requires changing the kind of questions we ask about inclusive education, as Gabel (2002) argues:

The first question is not whether a student is in an ability diverse inclusive classroom. The first question is whether the student (and his or her family, when age requires it) wants to be where they are and whether that classroom is a place where students and teachers are free to struggle to become new people and to live self-constructed lives as much as possible. (194)

Following Gabel's reframing of the question, the second part of this paper will try to draw lessons for inclusive education from an innovative SEN unit in a secondary school in the UK. While segregated, this unit takes a critical approach to education. The analysis will focus on three major aspects – the politics of disability, the accessibility of the curriculum and teaching, and the fostering of relations of belonging.

Learning about inclusion from a segregated unit

The research described in this paper was part of a PhD aimed at contributing to the development of an inclusive radical pedagogy by envisaging ways both to include students with diverse abilities in democratic communities and to understand disability as an axis of social oppression that should be transgressed through emancipatory political struggles. This called for a researcher positioning between that of an ethnographer seeking to understand the schooling context, and that of a dreamer, seeking to gain inspiration from the field and imagine the 'what if's of educational possibilities. As such, it was important to learn from good practice, and the research was therefore located in a school that was judged by OFSTED² to deliver 'outstanding' service to 'students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. I first heard of the school through a fellow PhD student who visited it and was highly impressed with its commitment to maximum inclusion and maximum achievement. With the school located in an ex-mining community, featuring high on social deprivation scales such as teenage pregnancies, early mortality and free school meals, this commitment is manifested in an innovative approach to curriculum, teaching and support across the school. The GCSE³ curriculum ranges from the more academic English, maths and science to construction, child care and floristry. Some students are offered the opportunity to do work

placements outside of the school for a day or two and are only asked to be in the classroom for three days a week. A student support unit is responsible for solving immediate problems such as providing food for students who came without their breakfast, or offering an upset student the chance to talk about what's on their mind. The school nurse runs a support group for the many students classified as 'young carers', and there is a range of counselling and pastoral support.

The school also has a separate unit, located in its own building and yard, away from the main school yard. It provides a 'primary school-like' setting for pupils who the staff feel would find it hard to cope in the large school setting. This unit was the site of the research which included 130 hours of observations in lessons, breaks and out-of-school activities, interviews with teachers and administrative staff on the unit, and creative workshops with students that were aimed at designing the 'best school in the world' (for more details on the use of creative workshops see Greenstein, forthcoming). An extensive field diary was taken during observations, and the interviews and workshops were audio-recorded and transcribed. Themes were identified in the data using thematic networks (Attride-Stirling 2001). However, as this research takes a stance of inspiration, aiming at describing good practice as well as imagining future possibilities, these themes were then read and analysed in relation to accounts of feminist and critical pedagogy. Thus, the analytical account given in the rest of this paper is not an attempt to fully describe and critique the practices in the unit, but rather to investigate how such practices may contribute to thinking around issues of inclusive and democratic education.

The politics of disability

The head of the unit described its inception as a possible solution for:

Quite a lot of low level disruptions in lessons from students who we felt were not accessing the curriculum. It might have been for a variety of reasons; it might have been for their learning needs, emotional needs, social needs, behavioural needs, or a combination of those (Mrs. D)

As an answer to these identified problems, a special unit was established based on the model of a primary school – a smaller-scale establishment that provides more individual attention, in the form of heightened support but also heightened surveillance (this will be further elaborated in the section about belonging).

This model incorporates much of the social model of disability (Oliver 1990b), which seeks to minimise exclusion by changing environments rather than individuals. In the quote above, disturbances are understood as resulting from the inaccessibility of the curriculum, and the solution lies with creating a differently structured environment that will enable access. Difference is framed in terms of needs rather than disorders, and this 'de-medicalised' approach is also manifested in the choice of students and teachers to be placed in the unit. The name of the unit contains no reference to SEN, and some of the students have no statement or formal diagnosis (though the majority of students with statements are placed in the unit). Similarly, only one of the teachers possesses formal SEN qualifications, and their attitudes and ability to engage in matters much more to the school's middle management than their 'specialised knowledge':

I look for staff who I think have the right relationship with students in the unit ... who communicate well, interest the children [...] who want to teach students with learning and behavioural issues [...] understanding, patient, a good listener. (Mrs. D, head of unit)

We need to get the right kind of staff with the right personality so it works, and we do that.
(Miss T., administrative coordinator of the unit)

One of the teachers spoke in the interview about a culture of ‘not blaming the children for not getting it’ but trying to find other ways to explain, thus striving for accessibility rather than labelling. This approach was also highly evident in observations, and concrete examples of which are discussed in the following section. Such attitudes and practices sit well with Skrtic’s (1995) critique of ‘pigeonholing’ practices and the need to view education as a unique relational process discussed in the previous section.

However, the imperative to change the environment here carries a double meaning – while the unit’s environment is made more accessible, it is the individual students who are removed from the main school environment to be placed in a separate unit. Having different environments in which students can study is not problematic in itself. The value of spaces of self-organisation of marginalised groups, such as women only spaces or ‘disabled only’ DAN (Disabled People’s Direct Action Network) meetings, is widely recognised within radical politics as a form of empowerment and a protection against assimilation to the norm (Young 1989). A diversity of educational settings that cater to diverse needs, interests and desires, is essential for democratic education, as long as the different options are equally valued (Fielding and Moss 2011). However, according to Young (1986), segregated spaces can only be considered a part of inclusive politics of difference when they are *self-organised* and embedded within social structures that also allow for integration. The school’s special unit, while providing an accessible environment and a strong sense of belonging, is not based on students’ choice, and provides little opportunity for interaction with main school students. This is particularly interesting, considering the fact that the vast majority of students, though not initially asked about their placement, prefer to be placed in it and see it as a supportive place that allows them to flourish, and actively avoid interacting with mainstream students. This tension will be further discussed in a later section.

Accessibility

The converging data from observations and interviews indicated to a continuous effort to make learning both accessible and *enjoyable* in a variety of ways. Some of the learning tasks were based on games that tended to engage students and offer some opportunity for movement, and art and drama were frequently incorporated into the learning. Though the content of lessons was organised with regard to the National Curriculum on different subjects, they were structured in a different way than in the main school. Most of the teaching was done by the same three teachers, and all the humanities subjects were taught through a topic-based curriculum that was planned to cover teaching around geography, history, religious education, etc. Topics such as Brazil and World War II, but also the World Cup, were taught for five hours a week and changed every half term. This structure aims to counter the fracturing of learning into subjects that are taught for an hour or two a week and minimise the number of staff and random requirements. For example, as one of the teachers testified, prior to establishing the topic learning structures, students were struggling to cope with the requirements of six different teachers a day, having to remember that the science teacher wanted the date on the left-hand side while the geography teacher wanted it on the

right-hand side. The topic curriculum also allowed for the incorporation of exciting projects, such as a staged battle activity when the topic was World War I, or making a Chinese dragon when studying about the Beijing Olympics. Many students have remembered and mentioned such projects as positive aspects of studying in the unit.

This approach sits well with critical pedagogy models that call for a problem-solving approach to learning that allows for knowledge to be constructed in a dialogue in which students bring their knowledge and experience to bear on issues discussed in class. However, while the topic learning allowed for multiple knowledges and fostered creativity, it did not encourage transformative knowledge that could be brought to use in fighting oppression. For example, when reading the book 'Flour Babies' (Fine 1994), which is set in a SEN unit, the students were invited to imagine and draw what the characters looked like, but no discussion about the need for a special unit or their thoughts on the matter ensued.

In interviews with the teaching and administrative staff of the unit, two main characteristics of a good teacher were repeatedly mentioned – commitment to constant change and evaluation rather than to the application of set and prescribed procedures, and valuing emotional aspects such as enthusiasm and joy.

'I want them [students] to enjoy coming to school, I want them to want to be here so that they can get the best out of it. I want them to enjoy the lessons, so there's quite a lot of pressure on staff to create lessons that are challenging, enjoyable, interactive. [...] It's also important to me to keep the staff happy as well, because you know, a happy staff hopefully makes a happy team, happy students. I want them to want to come to work, to enjoy the experience they have in their job at the same time as keeping everything in it. [...] also as the manager of the [unit] I have to be very proactive in moving this forward to keep up with time but also to move things forward and to try new things so it doesn't become stale, so that it keeps the students interest'. (Mrs. D, head of unit)

'It's about going back and trying to do things differently, and I think there's definitely got to be a culture of not blaming the kids, you know, if they don't get it, it's not their fault – which I think some of them have experienced in the primary school, you know, why are you not getting that, and ... you need to find another way, don't you, of doing it, cos it's not their fault, it's probably yours for not doing it differently ... so, it's trying to just be ... I suppose open minded about it, isn't it, just look for other different ways' (Mrs. S, teacher)

This approach stresses learning as a relational process in which both students and teachers are engaged in learning from each other and discovering ways to work together. The measurement for success is not just in the amount of skills mastered, but in the level of engagement, motivation and enthusiasm. This broadening of the scope of education corresponds to the hooks' (1994) idea of engaged pedagogy and with feminist ethics of care (Tronto 1993; Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005). On top of stressing enthusiasm and joy, fostering a sense of belonging was highly evident in the research, and the next section elaborates about its formation.

Belonging

Belonging emerged strongly as a theme through all aspects of the field work, from observations to interviews with staff and students. Students expressed a high sense of belonging and even pride in the unit, often characterising it as a place of respect and a safe haven from bullying and name-calling that were associated with the main

school. They valued the support and close relationships that were fostered by the small and intimate structure of the unit, and its stress on accessibility:

It's like a place where, you know, if you struggle with something like learning or writing or if you are just too scared to go in mainstream, you just go to the [special unit] and there it's like child friendly and all that (Jeff, year 9)

On several occasions the students also suggested that some special unit students who they thought were annoying should 'go back to main school', thus expressing the view that the main school, not the unit, was the space of exclusion. During one of the workshops, I conducted with a group of students, I asked them to build a cardboard model of the best school in the world. In their model, the students decided to get rid of the main school building altogether and insisted on having a sign that states 'we have a special unit'. There was only one student with the opposite interpretation, who resented his placement in the unit which he thought was for 'spaks'. Unlike the other students who saw the unit as a solution to bullying and a place to make friends, he understood it as the very reason for bullying. Also unlike the other students, who experienced the main school as the site of their exclusion, this boy had friends outside of the unit, in the main school and in the neighbourhood.

These examples, while testifying to the strong sense of belonging and offering a positive alternative to the common feeling of alienation and failure, many disabled students experience in secondary schools (Allan 2008), are also slightly worrying as they portray a view of dichotomous belonging that reifies fixed perceptions of 'Us' versus 'Them', where one can either belong to the main school or to the unit, but never to both. Yuval-Davis (2007) points to the need to carefully engage in such politics of belonging, which, while carrying significant importance to the social and emotional well being of individuals, also serves to construct the Other, often as a threat to the well-being of the community. I would argue that, while the atmosphere in the unit provided an encouraging starting point, in order not to reify oppressive dichotomies of belonging and exclusion, a more flexible model of belonging should be fostered, in which one can belong to multiple groups simultaneously, and have the freedom not just to participate, but also to disengage, moving back and forth between different positions.

The ethos of promoting a strong and supportive community was highly evident during observation, and was also reflected in the name of the unit (which cannot be cited here fully for reasons of anonymity). Much attention was given to developing positive peer relations – the weekly timetable included two hours of teaching the SEAL (socio-emotional aspects of learning) curriculum, and group work was incorporated in many lessons. The phrase 'there's no I in team' was repeated by teachers so many times that it was later echoed by students during the research group activities. In interviews, teachers have repeatedly stressed their high commitment to students' emotional needs, and saw the development of supportive relationships with students as an important part of their role. This unconditional commitment was often framed by using the metaphor of family:

'[. . .] I think the young people know the staff here to be worth looking after them, perhaps more than their own families sometimes.[. . .] When we were at the residential trip someone said to Mrs. D – 'it's not because they don't love you, cos they do, that's why they are like that with you'. It was like, you are the mum so they are allowed to tell you that they hate you, because that's what you do with your mum. There's that unquestioning commitment to them that they've got here, and I think that is what makes it special. (Miss T, administrative coordinator of the unit)

The family metaphor fits well with hooks' (1994) call for engaged pedagogy in which teachers' engagement is not limited to students' minds, but is also sensitive to their emotional and material needs. However, though not intended, the notion of the family as opposed to the community implies an essentialist sense of belonging. While 'communities' might represent voluntary assemblies with the option to opt in or out, the family represents unquestioned and unchangeable belonging which is seen as natural and self-evident, not a matter of constructed and contested social structures. Further, while the discourse of community assumes more or less horizontal peer relations, the discourse of family, and in particular that of parenting, assumes hierarchy. It is exactly this that allows Miss T. in the above quote to interpret students' hostility as an expression of love and trust rather than as resistance. Similarly, while students highly valued the support and close relationships enabled by the small and intimate structure of the unit, and generally characterised teachers in the unit as 'more fun and more better' (Chris, year 11) than their main school colleagues, they did note on a few occasions that the small size of the unit also offered teachers many more opportunities for control and surveillance relative to the large main school. Unlike the teachers' metaphor of family, which implies benevolent authority, in the few instances of critique of the unit's teachers, the students were using policing metaphors:

You can get away with murder there [main school]. They [main school teachers] don't care. (Diane, year 11)

It's like you are having a parole officer, like watching you all the time. (Billy, year 8)

This serves as a powerful reminder to the inseparable link between care and power. As feminist scholars argue, an analysis of power is a crucial part of the ethics of care – it is not only that social divisions relegate care work to people further down the hierarchy of power, but that care relations in themselves are fraught with power struggles, which can be both empowering and constraining (Tronto 1993; Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna 2005; Yuval-Davis 2011).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for the high relevance of critical pedagogy to debates about inclusive education. Critical pedagogy shares a lot of the critiques of mainstream education voiced by disability studies and inclusive education researchers, who argue that the functionalist and market rationalities that stand at the basis of educational policy are at odds with the interests, needs and abilities of students with diverse abilities. Thus, in the face of reports about the problems with placing disabled students in mainstream schools (see, for example, Warnock 2005), such researchers demand a systematic change in the practices *and ideologies* of mainstream education:

Are we talking about where children are placed and with what level of resource provision? Or, are we talking about the politics of value, about the purpose and content of curriculum, and about the range and conduct of pedagogy? (Slee 1997, 412)

The usefulness of ideas from critical pedagogy for changing the politics of value and opening a range of pedagogies has been illuminated by several researchers. Erevelles (2000) draws on critical pedagogy and disability studies to analyse the material oppression operating in mainstream education. Gabel (2002) stresses issues of autonomy and

authorship; Goodley (2007) draws on poststructuralist theory and critical pedagogy to endorse education that values change and fluidity rather than trying to fix students into measurable norms; and Ware (2009) examines the use of ideas from critical pedagogy to foster positive disability identity. In this paper, I have stressed the importance of critically examining issues of power when thinking about inclusive education.

The research findings have indicated that resisting functionalist approaches to education through organising the curriculum around topics and resisting arbitrary segmentation, combined with an approach that values diverse knowledges and promotes relational aspects of learning such as joy and belonging just as much as academic achievement, can produce an accessible and enjoyable learning environment in which students can fully develop and enjoy a sense of pride and positive self-esteem. These achievements are highly impressive and provide some inspiring alternatives to the realities of exclusion common to much educational provision. However, a lack of critical engagement with the wider social structures that produce these realities of exclusion can make this alternative vulnerable to recuperation.

Social inequalities and educational inequalities are reciprocally linked, and it is impossible to change education while leaving wider social structures intact. Lower socioeconomic status is connected to poorer attainment in school, and poor attainment limits students' economic possibilities (Lynch 2001). Similarly, cultural assumptions and norms are reified through education, and in the process reproduce subjects who want to fulfil these norms. It is here that critical pedagogy is most promising to inclusive education through its stress on praxis – the connection of knowing and acting through understanding personal circumstances in relation to social structures. Inclusive education means more than ending disabling practices within schools, it means including in the curriculum and in educational relationships the knowledge and attitudes required for actively resisting injustice and providing a space to practice such resistance.

Notes

1. A statement of special educational needs is a legal document stating the specialist educational provision necessary to meet a child's needs. A statement can only be given following assessment involving medical and psychological professionals.
2. The Office of Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (OFSTED) is an official UK body responsible for the ongoing inspection and evaluation of schools.
3. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken by students aged 14–16 in secondary schools in the UK. Achieving five or more GCSEs with high grading (A*–C) is a common requirement for continuing in academic rather than vocational routes.

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