A jelly jigsaw, with missing pieces and no picture? Engaging with the dilemmas, tensions and contradictions of education and inclusion.

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Contradictions, tensions and dilemmas are characteristic of and endemic in education (Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson, 1999). Moreover, moves towards inclusion tend to generate dilemmas and tensions at school and policy levels (Dyson & Millward, 2000). Both Norwich (2007) and Allan (2006), whilst proposing different ways of dealing with dilemmas, acknowledge that they need to be acknowledged rather than ignored. Conversations need to be had at school and policy level about these tensions and the implications they will have on any future model of a school.

I propose to use this workshop to give space for educational researchers to engage with 1/ their assumptions about the future, 2/ their values and ethos and 3/ the effect of dilemmas, tensions and issues in education systems on their values, ethos and assumptions (and vice versa). This workshop is based on findings from my doctoral thesis (Black, 2012) which explored why some pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities leave mainstream for special schools at secondary transfer, and went on to describe a model of a school for 2025 that sought to address these issues.

The hour long workshop will begin with the facilitator (myself) introducing a school of the future, one designed by the facilitator to address barriers to inclusion in secondary schools, such as the size of schools, organisational practices and school ethos. The process of the school of the future’s design and evaluation will be described. Several emerging tensions with the model and questions arising from it will be highlighted. These include (but are not limited to):

Curriculum entitlement versus student choice of curriculum;

Meeting needs of the individual versus meeting needs of a group;

Parental choice of school versus creating student diversity

Can we legislate against/change parental attitudes, choice and motives? Should we? What if parental motives differ from school ethos and policy?

At this point the workshop will become more hands-on. The participants will gather in small groups to discuss their chosen dilemma(s), to consider solutions or resolutions, or even if the tension will ever be resolved. After 20 minutes the groups will feed back to the rest of the participants. During this feedback the facilitator will note key points/questions and when each group has fed back the facilitator will open the questions to the floor. This will hopefully lead to an engaging discussion about tensions and dilemmas in the school system and with inclusive education.

This workshop is innovative in that as well as just presenting the problems of inclusion it gives participants the time and space to engage with them, to bring their expertise in their field to the discussion, but also to allow them to engage with other experts. By engaging with the tensions ways to move beyond them may be seen.


